



まよ ちき!

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ボクは、
もう泣かない。

「すまなかった。
やっと……自分でも
情けないくらい遅いけど、
やっとそのことに気が付くことが
できたんだ。だから——」

まぢき!

Chapter 1: Winter

Today is the 21st of November. It still feels like the middle of fall...or so I'd like to think, but the seasons pass awfully quickly. Even though the sky was clear, once night rolled around, it became awfully cold. A rampant cold assaulted the city.

Winter—that's the name of the season currently approaching us. And on the 21st of November, I felt the cold air make my skin feel numb. At the same time, it was a special day for her—Usami Masamune. Back in September, a calamity caused the Sakamachi Family house to burn down, which is why I had lost a place to stay. Thankfully, she offered to let me live in her apartment for the time being.

She's a fierceful girl that had the fitting twintails to back it up. And, she's somewhat of a nasty rabbit. When I first met her, she gave off a thorny atmosphere that wouldn't let anybody approach her, and that's around the time I called her that. And today, the 21st of November, is her birthday; the birthday when Usami Masamune turns 17. And today is another special day, as she mustered up her courage to confess to me—Sakamachi Kinjirou.

“Masamune, I'm coming in.”

Right now, it was around 7pm in the evening. I knocked on her room's door, and slowly opened it.

“You alright?” I asked, to which a faint “M-Mmm...” came back from the bed.

On her forehead, she had a cooling patch typically used for colds. Getting a closer look at her, she had reddened cheeks as well. This happened after the confession at dawn. Masamune suddenly collapsed. At first, I thought it was simply out of embarrassment because of her confession, but it clearly wasn't some romcom kind of development, and she actually had collapsed because of a cold.

Yeah, the nights sure had gotten cold lately, but it wasn't that drastic of a change. The season had already progressed towards winter. And,

with the seasons changing, it was quite easy for people to suffer from a cold like this.

“...Sorry about this, stupid chicken.”

“No need to apologize. If anything, I’m the one who’s sorry. I didn’t even realize.”

Masamune gave me an awkward apology, as she covered herself with the blanket. Maybe it was because of her cold, but her nasty rabbit attitude had wandered off elsewhere. Instead, she simply looked up at me with a worried expression. She’s as docile as the rabbits in the rabbit cafe.

“.....”

Ahh, right. We went on a date today. Not to mention a double date of all dates. The members consisted of Masamune and me as one couple, as well as Konoe and Suzutsuki as the other. I really don’t want to dive into the details as to why this mess even happened, but we basically walked around the town in groups of two. But...

“For today, just get some good rest, okay.”

I may have wanted to forget all of that, as I spoke up to Masamune. After that confession incident, I carried her back to her apartment. According to her, she’s been feeling off the entire morning. She could have cancelled the date as well, but she instead decided to act fine. I don’t blame her, she was clearly looking forward to the date.

Going on a date in town might be something normal for a high school student, but Masamune is different. She was never able to put trust in others. Having been raised in a somewhat peculiar family environment, she ended up distrustful towards others. Naturally, that resulted in her having zero friends. Until she met us, she never had anybody even close enough to call a friend. That’s why...I bet she must have been looking forward to it. Going on a date with all of us, that is.

As a result of that, she kept her bad health hidden. Well, she probably didn’t expect herself to end up bedridden either.

“Has your fever gone down?”

“Yeah, it’s 38.3°C.”

“That’s still pretty damn high!”

“Ahaha...I’m feeling a bit sluggish as well, but to think it’d end up this messed up...” She said, and showed a weak smile.

...Dang it, forcing herself again. If today wasn’t a Sunday, I would have definitely taken her to the hospital. Oh yeah, she would probably say no because it would be a waste of money.

“More importantly...what is this?”

“Eh? You can’t tell? It’s rice porridge.” I told her, and revealed a small pot beneath the larger lid.

Inside of it was rice porridge, the average sick person’s delicacy.

“You made that?”

“Yeah...or so I’d like to stay, but it’s the instant type. I bought it at a nearby convenience store.”

It pains me to admit it, but I most definitely suck at cooking. After all, Masamune or my little sister Kureha take care of it. So, I had no other choice but to rely on the nearby convenience store.

“But, it’s at least better than having my homemade version, right?”

“Probably. Her cooking was awful as well.”

“Her?”

“Your sister. Sheesh, to think you’d let her take care of the Sakamachi Family’s cooking.”

“Not like it wasn’t edible.”

“Her choice in ingredients was weird to say the least! Why is it always red stuff every single time...!” Masamune screamed, only to cough violently.

Not good, I can't have her retort to stuff like normal. When I was down with a cold, and forced to retort all the time, I remember my body not handling that very well. Well, not like I was actually being nursed back to health back then.

"That reminds me." For now, I decided to change the topic. "This is the first time I actually entered your room, right?"

"Eh? Really?"

"Yeah. We've been living together for a month now, but I never really had any reason to."

"I...I see. Now I'm feeling a bit nervous. It might be a bit messy, but don't worry about it."

"....." I couldn't help but grow silent.

Rather than being messy, there was a much bigger problem with this room. I faintly looked around...and only saw rabbits. Or rather, rabbit goods everywhere. The most prominent object in this entire room must be the rabbit plush toys. It looked like a shrine built out of rabbit plush toys, filling the entire room. Then, the bed sheets, the pillow, pens, posters, even drawings and pictures, the place was filled to the brim with rabbit goods. It's like a rabbit paradise of sorts.

"Cute, right? Makes it seem so lively."

"Rather than lively, everything just feels off..."

"What do you mean by that!?"

"Well..."

Simply looking at this room, it is cute for sure. However, seeing such a mass of rabbits is more eerie than anything. Rather than Biohazard, it's more like Rabbithazard. I feel like I'm surrounded by a flock of zombies.

"Still, gathering all of this must have been pretty tough, right?"

“It was a lot of work for sure. Since I don’t have any money, I had to get a lot of this stuff for free, or online during auctions.”

“Why are you working that hard for it...”

“Also, I got a lot of these from the vice prez.”

“Oh yeah, Schrö-senpai’s family is a toy manufacturer, right.”

Of course, with Schrö-senpai, I’m talking about the megane junkie Nakuru’s older sister, Narumi Schrödinger. Her family is known for having created the Silent Sheep, but they’re also focusing on some more...orthodox goods. At the very least, I didn’t see any dangerous rabbit goods in there.

“Also, you’ve got a pretty feminine interest, huh.”

“What...they’re cute, so what does it matter?”

She seemed to have been embarrassed about having her interests called feminine, as she pouted like a young child, visibly sulking. Well, I don’t think it’s a bad thing to have feminine tastes. Even though she’s a girl like my own little sister, she’s entirely different from her. Oh yeah, Kureha’s room was full of messy plush toys, which she used as punching bags for her wrestling moves.

“S-So, since you finished what you wanted, maybe you should get out now? I don’t want you to catch my cold.”

“No need to worry about that. My body is built so that I rarely catch any colds.”

“What kind of body do you have!?”

“I’ve been trained to overcome most status ailments, so to speak.”

Then again, I did catch a cold during last Golden Week, but that was mostly related to me doing all-nighters and generally being exhausted. That’s why, this is no problem.

“So, let me take care of you.”

“Eh? Take care of...Are you going to make me take off my clothes so that you can wipe off my sweat...”

“No.”

“T-Then...are you going to use onions to...No! How messed up of a person can you be!?”

“You’re the one getting weird ideas, so I’m clearly not as messed up as you!”

Her fantasies are all over the place again. It’s like her head is a pink mess. Maybe that’s only worse now because of her fever. Still, taking care of her while she’s sick...Thinking about it, I don’t have much experience with that. Both Mom and Kureha never were sick. The only weak guy in our family was Dad, and I wasn’t at an age where I could actively take care of him. Talking about nursing someone back to health reminds me of what happened during Golden Week, with Konoe taking care of me...

“.....”

...Not good. Now I’m suddenly feeling embarrassed.

“What’s wrong?”

It must have shown on my face, because Masamune showed me a dubious gaze. Seeing her, I spoke up with a quivering voice.

“...Should I feed you?”

“——!” Masamune audibly swallowed her breath, and closely inspected the rice porridge I was carrying.

“D...D...Don’t be ridiculous! Why would I have to be fed by you!?”

“Y-You don’t have to get so angry, alright.”

“I-I-I’m not angry! I’m totally calm! I couldn’t care less about any of this! “

“...Alright, if you’re against it, I won’t...”

“Ah...”

I put down the rice porridge on the table, about to leave the room, when Masamune frantically stopped me with a ‘W-Wait!’. Turning around, she had pushed up half of her body, looking at me with a bashful expression.

“T-That reminds me...during today’s date, I fed you some omurice, right?”

“Yeah, that did happen...”

Today at the rabbit cafe, she forcefully fed me the omurice I ordered...Though, was it really that kind of action? I feel like she rather stuffed my mouth full with it instead.



“That’s why, to make up for that, maybe you should be feeding me now. But...”

“But?”

“Well...I was never nursed back to health by anybody, so I’m a bit embarrassed...” She fidgeted with her fingers, explaining with a voice that sounded like it was about to disappear.

...Ahh, I see. Considering her family environment, I can see why she wouldn't have much experience with that. But...

“_____”

Isn't that just far too depressing? Normally, you would be thankful to have someone with you when you're sick. That's why...

“—Come on.”

I slowly scooped up some rice porridge with the spoon I brought with me, and carefully pushed it towards her.

“If you don't hurry up and eat it, it'll get cold.”

“Y-Yeah...Um, stupid chicken...”

“What?”

“Well...uh...Thank you.” She bashfully said, her face beet red.

“...It's fine, so just eat up.”

“Ah, don't suddenly...Mhm, hoff.”

“Ah, sorry, was that too hot? I'll blow on it next time.”

“You...you don't have to do that! Also, I'm shocked you can do something so embarrassing this easily!”

“Really? I did this a lot for Kureha.”

“...For Sakamachi? What? Were you that close?”

“Hell no.”

“Feeding her even though you aren't close at all...Don't tell me, were you doing some weird roleplay where you tie her up, and go ‘Now, Kureha, eat up’...!?”

“Maybe you really should go to the hospital, huh!”

No matter how I look at it, this definitely is a bad fever. Or, do I look

like the kind of guy who would do that kind of thing to his little sister?

“I mean, she likes wrestling moves and all that, remember? Because of that, she’s always hurt her arms, and was unable to properly eat food.”

“.....I know it sounds weird coming from me, but your family environment is pretty twisted...” Masamune held her head in disbelief.

Is she okay? She might just need medicine against a headache rather than the cold.

“But, she’s called you [Onii-chan] despite that, right?”

“Yeah. She’s kept that until she enrolled at high school.”

“...Hmmm.” Masamune chomped on the rice porridge, and showed a somewhat jealous reaction. “How nice...”

“...Masamune. Let’s go to the hospital after all.”

“Why!?”

“I think we really should get your head checked out. While we’re there, let’s get you a CT scan—”

“Can you stop indirectly insulting me!? Why would you even think about that?!”

“I mean, you’re definitely off, right now. Why would you be jealous about something like that?”

“W-What’s the big problem? Since I’m an only-child, I always wanted a younger sibling.”

“Wanted...”

“Just once, I wanted somebody to say ‘Onee-chan, let’s play together~’, okay.”

“.....”

Let me think about that. If Kureha said ‘Nii-san, let’s play together~’...yeah, I would run away. Until the end of the world, even. Those words are like a declaration of death for me. It’s like you heard a loud gong above you, declaring the beginning of the match.

“Well, leaving that aside, we really should take you to a hospital tomorrow.”

“Urk...do I really have to?”

After she finished eating the rice porridge, Masamune showed a painful expression.

“Do you not want to pay money that badly?”

“T-That’s one thing, but...”

“...Do you hate needles?”

“O-O-O-Of course not!? Why would I be afraid of that!?”

“Nobody said anything about you being scared...”

“~~~! I mean, they stab them right into your arm right...Seeing that, and feeling the pain is just...”

“Well, you’re not wrong.”

I feel like Kureha said something similar before. When I argued that ‘No no! You’re much more terrifying than any needle!’, she countered with ‘Nii-san, you dummy!’, and slammed me into the ground with a pile driver move. See, she’s way scarier than some needles.

“Mm...”

There, as I was reminiscing in my flashback, Masamune suddenly started shaking ever so slightly. Maybe she’s cold?

“You alright? Did your fever go up?”

“...Yeah, might have. I’m feeling a bit cold now.”

“Alright, just wait a second, I’ll get another blanket—” I tried to stand up, but Masamune immediately denied that with a fierce ‘N-No!’.

“Hm? You don’t have to worry about me, another blanket isn’t that big of a deal.”

If anything, that’s more than enough for a bed. At least compared to living on the balcony. I feel like I built up some resistance to the cold now. If I continued living like that, I might have turned into a Yeti.

“B-But, using the blanket you were using...that’s a bit too embarrassing...and I don’t think I can sleep like that...” She started mumbling towards the end, making it hard for me to understand her, as she blushed furiously.

Hmmm, what to do about this...

“...Stupid chicken.” Masamune called out my name, almost like she was afraid. “You just said that you rarely catch a cold, right?”

“Huh? Yeah. As long as I’m not particularly exhausted, I don’t think I would catch your cold.”

“.....”

For some reason, Masamune grew silent, and started thinking. And then, the silence dispersed.

“Then, let’s do it like this.” She seemed a bit hesitant, as she beckoned me over.

“.....?” I tilted my head, and sat down next to her on the bed.

With my back to her—

“...!? H-Hey!” I subconsciously screamed.

As expected, I might add. After all, Masamune suddenly embraced me from behind.

“...Um, Masamune-san?”

“W-What, huh!? Do you have a problem with this!?”

“No, rather than that...”

I was still confused as to what she was even doing.

“Don’t give me such a dubious face. Your job is...to be a hot-water bottle.”

“...A hot-water bottle?”

“I mean, that’s how you warm up your bodies if you end up stranded in the mountains, right? And since you don’t catch a cold, there’s no problem.”

“N-No problem...!?”

I mean, I get where she’s coming from, but that method is all over the place. Remember? I have gynophobia, because I was constantly used as a punching bag by Mom and my little sister for more than ten years, so any kind of physical contact with a girl gives me a nosebleed, and eventually makes me pass out. Of course, Masamune should know about that, but...

“Also, this is a treatment for your gynophobia. With this, you’ll get used to being close to a girl, right?”

“Y-You might be right about that, but...”

Why is there any need to do a treatment right now, right this moment. If anything, we should focus on her recovering quickly. Now you don’t even know who the sick person is.

“...Or, do you not want this?” She asked, sounding anxious. “If you don’t want me doing this, I’ll stop right away...”

“.....”

“...Stupid chicken?”

“...Alright. I get it already, so don’t give me such a teary voice.”

“Wha...I wasn’t teary or anything! Definitely not!”

“Yeah yeah, then stop screaming. Your fever will get worse again.”

“Urk...Stupid...stupid chicken...” Masamune grit her teeth, as she clung to me even stronger, like she sought out more body warmth of mine.

“Ugh!?”

“Ah...stupid chicken? Are you...okay?”

“...Y-Yeah, somewhat...” I responded, but my head was already feeling dizzy, with a cold sweat running down my forehead.

Waahhh...I feel like I’ve gotten used to girls a lot more over this half of a year, but this still is pretty tough. I’m trying really hard to not get a nosebleed right now.

“W-Well, I’m still fine, so don’t worry about me.”

“.....Okay, thanks.” She sounded relieved, as she gave me her thanks.

...Yeah, over this past month, we’ve been living together. We’re basically like a family now. That’s why, I want to give the best I can.

“...Mm.” With a faint breath, Masamune gently hugged my body.

On my back, I felt her warmth, as well as the beat of her heart. Then, silence followed. We both just stayed quiet, but I don’t know how much time passed. Finally—

“—Hey, stupid chicken.” Masamune still hugged me, and spoke up. “I really like you.”

Ba-dump, my heart shook. I completely forgot about my gynophobia for a moment. She must have been nervous, as her heart started racing faster...Yeah, that’s right. Today, Masamune confessed to me.

‘I—want to become your real family!’

Amidst the orange-colored scenery, that’s what she said with a quivering voice. And then, she kissed me. She called it her birthday present, asking for the one thing she wanted from me the most.

“

I couldn’t say anything. My consciousness felt like it was spinning. Maybe it’s because of my gynophobia, but it felt like there was something else. What should I do? How should I respond to her confession...

“...It’s fine.”

However, these words pulled me out of my thoughts.

“...It’s not like I want to hear your answer right now.”

“

“Well...how do I say this. I’m sure that this must have come out of nowhere, and I wouldn’t want to hear your response immediately... That’s why, just like I did, I want you to properly think about your feelings...and then give me your answer.”

“...Masamune.”

When I called out her name, the warm sensation on my back disappeared. In a daze, I touched my face, but there were no traces of any nosebleed. It seems like I barely managed to hold it in. That’s something unbelievable on my end. Being fine after feeling a girl’s touch like that, the me half a year ago would have never imagined something like that.

Time flows, and just as the season is turning to winter, a long time has passed since the treatment for my gynophobia began. And just like that, our relationships begin to change. This noisy and chaotic daily life is something I had thought would continue forever. And yet...

“Stupid chicken.” Masamune called out to me, pulling me back to reality.

I slowly stood up, and turned around, to which I found Masamune giving me a serious expression.

“There’s one request I have of you...Can I?”

“A request...?”

“Yeah. The thing is...it’s about Suzutsuki Kanade. Could you maybe check up on her?” She said, sounding anxious. “You remember, right? What I said to her at the cafe.”

“...Yeah.”

How could I forget about that? After all, that was the first time I’ve ever seen Suzutsuki like that, since we became partners in crime back in April.

‘You and I are the same.’

That’s what Masamune said at the rabbit cafe. Basically, she was saying that Suzutsuki is unable to put trust in others. Before, Masamune had been a lone wolf, not getting too close to anybody, not approaching anybody. And she said that she and Suzutsuki are the same. At school, Suzutsuki acts like the perfect honor student. That is because she can’t put trust in others like Masamune. What they’re doing is the opposite, but deep down it’s the same. That’s why Masamune said the following to Suzutsuki.

‘But...that’s exactly why I wanted us to be friends...because I want to save you! I want you to be with me, who always was alone at school!’

“...Honestly speaking, I regret it.” Masamune spoke like she was confessing her sins. “I clearly said too much. I didn’t have to be that forceful.”

“.....”

“But, how do I say this...Looking at Suzutsuki Kanade, I just couldn’t leave things the way they were...So everything I kept inside of me, I

just let it all out...”

“.....”

“Not to mention...she’s been acting weird as of late. Like she’s desperately trying to act normal...but on the inside, she must have been panicking. She seemed so insatiable...That’s why I just...”

“.....”

Masamune tried to explain herself with a wimpy voice. Ahh, I see. She probably couldn’t keep watching Suzutsuki like that. It’s almost like she saw herself in Suzutsuki, I bet. That’s why she said something like that to her.

“—Don’t worry.” I wanted to give her some piece of mind, which is why I calmly spoke up. “I’m going over there right now, checking up on her.”

She lived right next to us, together with her butler Konoe. During the date, Suzutsuki practically ran away, but I bet she must have returned now. That’s why...I need to do what I can. I’m partially to blame why things ended up this way. At the very least, the distance between me and Suzutsuki—as well as Konoe—seems so distant compared to before. It’s all because of my confession. Just like Masamune did towards me, I confessed to Konoe. I was rejected without any room to argue, which is why I was depressed for a short period of time, but now I’m reaping what I sowed. It even influenced the relationship we had.

“.....”

Oh yeah, what about Konoe? Because Masamune collapsed on that stop, everything turned messy, but just like I took Masamune with me to our apartment, she should have gone back to her room. Suzutsuki Kanade and Konoe Subaru are master and butler. They aren’t on bad terms, but Suzutsuki said to ‘Leave me alone’, so I just hope nothing bad happened.

“.....”

And then, there's one more thing that happened because of that incident with Masamune. It was related to my relationship with Konoe...

"Sorry. I know I should be the one to go, but..."

"No, you're sick, so you stay here." I said, and headed for the door.

Having Masamune act while she's sick is one thing, and I don't think that Suzutsuki will even meet her. That's why I have to go.

"...Stupid chicken."

Right as I put my hand on the door knob, Masamune stopped me.

"What?" I turned around, but Masamune shook her head with a '... No, it's nothing', and laid back down again.

Seeing that, I carefully opened the door.

♀ × ♂

Best friends—that is my current relationship with Konoe Subaru. During summer break, we went on a trip, and Konoe said that she wanted to become best friends with me. Ever since then, our relationship has been great. However, at the amusement park...That's when I confessed to her. I was foolish to say the least. I ruined the relationship we had, and we felt more distant than before, creating an awkward atmosphere.

On top of that, she even said that she started dating Suzutsuki, last month to be precise, which led to Masamune announcing that the two of us are dating. That's why we went on the double date, but...

"_____"

Remembering all of that, I grit my teeth. I now stood in the hallway of our flat, in front of the apartment that Konoe and Suzutsuki were using. I simply stood in front of it, my head full with bad thoughts, as I let out a sigh. Pull yourself together, me. Right now, I need to think about Suzutsuki. That's why I should only press the doorbell. But...

“Damn it.”

A certain scenery filled my head.

‘Maybe we should—stop being best friends for a while.’

In front of the flat, that’s what I said. I went and said it. I simply wanted to keep some distance from Konoe Subaru. It’s clear that she’s hiding something from me. Because of that, it felt like the more I approached her, the more I ended up hurting her—and I couldn’t keep watching. That’s why I told her that, I bet. I just wanted some more time to think.

“.....”

But, Konoe was crying. Hearing my words, she shed large grains of tears. I still can’t forget that scenery. Maybe I did something irreversible. Thinking about it that way, the finger approaching the doorbell suddenly started feeling so heavy.

“.....”

No, I can’t. No matter the result, if I don’t do anything now, nothing will ever change. I promised Masamune that I’d look after Suzutsuki. And, she’s insanely unstable right now. Someone has to look after her.

“—Alright.”

I made up my mind, and pressed the doorbell. **Ding-dong**, a sound rang out, and I heard someone walking behind the door. Yeah, I won’t be able to back out now. Is it Konoe, or is it Suzutsuki? Either way, I can’t run away. And with these thoughts in mind, the door opened. My heart skipped a beat. Who is it?

“—Eh?”

However my expectations had been betrayed.

“Good evening.” A robotic voice greeted me.

The person who opened the door wore a frilly maid dress with long,

wine red hair. On top of that, she had a distinct point that made her stand out from any other maid—An eye patch, covering her left eye. This mismatched and misplaced fashion style was all too familiar to me.

“...Ichigo-san?”

“YES. It’s been a while, Odd Jobs-san.”

She called me by the same name as before, showing no expression whatsoever on her face.

“W-Why are you here?” I asked.

Suzutsuki only brought Konoe as her butler with her. That’s why Ichigo-san should be back at the Suzutsuki Residence, taking care of things.

“It’s not anything weird. I am the Suzutsuki Family’s servant, and Kanade-ojousama’s maid. If she orders me to, I shall come running.”

“So, Suzutsuki called you here?”

“YES.” Ichigo-san showed a satisfied expression.

What is going on? Why did Suzutsuki call her over? No, more importantly...

“Ichigo-san, is Suzutsuki present right now?”

“Naturally. If not, I wouldn’t be here. She called me to this apartment.”

“Is that so...”

Knowing that Suzutsuki was back, I could sigh in relief. At the very least, she didn’t run away from home like Kureha did. Not like she could seek refuge at Nakuru’s place.

“More importantly.” Ichigo-san looked at me. “Odd Jobs-san, why are you here?”

“Eh?” I was taken by surprise.

.....Did she not hear the circumstances from Suzutsuki? If so, then maybe I should hurry up and explain the—

“!?”

There, a metallic object appeared in front of me—A chainsaw. No clue where she took it out from, but it looked like one you’d see in a gorey horror movie, used as a killing weapon. Naturally, that very blade was aimed at my throat.

“.....”

I forgot...this person is clinically in LOVE with Suzutsuki.

“Tell me, Odd Jobs-san.” Her expression showed no change, as she asked. “Why have you come to Kanade-ojousama?”

“U-Um...that’s...”

“Not to mention this late at night.”

“It’s barely 8pm though!?”

“Oh, right. This isn’t the time for you to attack her in her sleep.”

“What are you even saying...!?”

“So, are you a stalker?”

“Don’t frame me for that kind of stuff!”

“Stalking Kanade-ojousama...I’m so jealous!”

“That’s the part where you should have said ‘I won’t forgive you!’, you know!?”

“Hmpf, I’m not in the wrong.”

“Don’t just play it off like that!”

Ahhh, I can’t deal with her. Also, hasn’t her LOVE for Kanade-

ojousama escalated even more? Maybe she's gone crazy after being left behind in the Suzutsuki residence? It's like she is running low on Suzutsuki energy.

"Didn't you move to Masamune's home?"

"Eh...? You didn't know?"

"...About what?"

"Masamune's place. It's right next-door."

"....." Ichigo-san ended up silent for a moment. "Odd Jobs-san, liars deserve to die."

"...Are you alright in the head?"

"I'm perfectly fine. So, have you written your testament?"

"You've gone mad!"

Her entire thought process is all over the place! What answer is the correct one here!?

"You lied."

"H-Hold on, I wasn't lying—"

"Now then, let's proceed with the execution."

"So quickly!?"

"Don't worry. When I say execution, it will be in society's eyes."

"...In society's eyes?"

"I will scream right now. That will alarm all the residents. And then I just have to declare something that will get you arrested..."

"You plan to get me arrested!?"

"Urk...I said I didn't want this...but he forced himself onto me...', you know."

“Stop with the solid acting now of all times!”

“He made me wear maid clothes, forcing me into some weird roleplay...’, as well.”

“You’ve been wearing these clothes from the very beginning, right!? Also, there’s a bigger problem than that!”

After all, she still has the chainsaw aimed at my throat. If anybody saw this, they’d clearly judge me as the victim of this situation. Well, I actually am.

“It’s fine, I can explain the chainsaw.”

“And how?”

“Urk...I said I didn’t want this...but he forced it onto me...’, maybe?”

“In what world would anybody believe that kind of nonsense!?”

I mean, the world is a big place, somebody might have that kind of fetish out there, but I don’t want to believe in that. I prefer it much softer.

“As I said, I’m not lying. Masamune lives in this flat. Would you like to meet her then?”

“...But, this is weird. I thought she was supposed to be poor?”

“Did you really not hear anything from Masamune?”

Even though they’re in the same club...Oh yeah, Ichigo-san barely shows up at the club. Guess they didn’t talk as much.

“There’s actually a reason for this.”

“...Reason?”

“To be perfectly honest, a lot of...things happened in her apartment, which is why it’s so cheap.”

That being said, that ghost possessing her apartment...Sakamoto-

san...had already been exorcised by my little sister with a German suplex...I mean, it still is hard to believe, but I can't change the facts.

"A-A lot of things...?"

Unexpectedly enough, Ichigo-san's expression froze up, after hearing the circumstances...Don't tell me...

"Are you...scared?"

"...Of what?"

"Ghosts?"

"...O-O-Of course not. W-Why would a maid like me..." She said, but she was shaking despite that.

Woah, I didn't expect that...I can't believe that yandere maid is actually scared of ghosts. She was terrified of the rabbit as well before, so she might have a lot of unexpected weaknesses. Well, not like anybody is perfect.

"—Leaving that aside." Ichigo-san smoothly cut off the conversation, and continued. "Why are you here, Odd Jobs-san?"

"That's..." I grew silent.

I came here to meet Suzutsuki, talk about the date.

"Oh yeah, you reek of Kanade-ojousama for some reason."

"I"

"Did you meet her today?"

"....."

"You're not going to tell me that you went on a date, right?" She glared at me.

I-Is she a dog or something? To think she'd figure it out by just the smell alone. I feel like Konoe said something similar during last summer break, but are all servants of the Suzutsuki Family like that?

Are they like some drug-smelling dogs used at airports?

“Tell me. Depending on it...” She said, and pointed her gaze at my throat.

Not good, I'll be turned into tuna served at the local convenience store. This high-class flat will be turned into a murder scene. After she dismembered me, she might put me out on a scavenger hunt. I really don't want such a gross auction. I need to resolve everything while I can—

“—Ichigo? What are you doing?”

Suddenly, a dignified voice rang out. Ichigo twitched in shock, and turned towards that voice, responding with a meek ‘M-My dearest apologies’, lowering her head. The person who stood behind her was —

“Oh my, Jirou-kun. What brings you here?”

Suzutsuki Kanade, the rich lady with her black hair tied up into twin side tails, gave me a calm smile. Her expression seemed the exact same as always.

♀ × ♂

“S-Suzutsuki? You...you're okay?” I reflexively asked.

“...? What do you mean?”

“Well, I mean...”

Don't give me that...Have you forgotten about everything that happened today? There's no way you could just forget about Masamune's words.

“...Fufu.” Suzutsuki saw me getting silent, and showed a grin. “Don't worry, Jirou-kun. I'm the same as always.”

“...But, you went home alone, right? Both Konoe and Masamune were worried...And same goes for me, of course.”

"I'm sorry. I'll apologize for going home alone. I was just not feeling well."

"....."

She's making up nonsense. This has to be a lie. The reason she went home alone is because she wanted to run away from us.

"That's why—I'm fine."

"Eh...?"

Suzutsuki said, almost too nonchalantly.

"I'm fine."

"....."

"Things were a bit messy today, but starting tomorrow, I'll be back to normal. Same old Suzutsuki Kanade. Tell Usami-san I'm okay. I'm not bothered by what she said. After all..."

"...After all?"

Suzutsuki stayed quiet for a moment, as silence filled the hallway. And then, she slowly moved her lips.

"After all, I'm Suzutsuki Kanade." She said, and smiled.

It was a perfect smile that would make everybody entranced. But, that only made it seem more fake, as it was too perfect.

"See you, Jirou-kun." She left these words behind, and turned around. "Tomorrow at school."



Chapter 2: The Return of Sakamachi Kureha

“...I’m back.”

I opened up the front door of Masamune’s apartment without even thinking twice, like it became my new home for real, and spoke up with a voice devoid of any energy. Naturally, that was because of what just happened.

‘I’m fine now.’

It sounded like she completely denied all my words, just staying stubborn no matter what. But...

“.....!”

I felt my chest tightening up. Something doesn’t feel right. Something feels very bad here. What doesn’t sit right with me...is that fake and perfect smile of hers. I mean, she is keeping up a facade at school, but still...

“.....”

Just wait a second. Was that—really the Suzutsuki I know? That’s the question that wouldn’t leave me. It was awfully vague, but she felt different from Suzutsuki. Devil Suzutsuki, or so I’ve been calling her. Let alone her Deretsuki-san, Yamitsuki-san, Derechuki-san, it’s like she was Frie*a-sama or some robot out of Mac*oss. That showed the devilish acting talent she possessed. However, the current Suzutsuki felt different.

“...Damn it.”

As I thought, maybe I should go to her room one more time? Suzutsuki said she’s fine, but that sure didn’t look that way. Not to mention that there’s also Konoe. I haven’t even talked to her since.

“...Hm?”

As I was thinking to myself in the entrance, I realized something odd down at my feet. Right now, it was just me and Masamune living here. That's why, only our shoes should be standing at the entrance. However, what I spotted now were small loafers, who looked all too familiar.

“...Kureha?”

That's right, Sakamachi Kureha. She is my younger sister, and the little monster of the Sakamachi Family. Those are her shoes, no doubt about it. Eh? How could I tell? Because I'm her older brother..... Well, it's not that convenient. It's just that I've eaten a lot of missile kicks while she wore those loafers, so I can recognize them immediately. Still, why is she here?

Last week, she ran away from his apartment. Since she left behind a letter like out of some TV drama, I thought that maybe she had her heart broken or something, but that wasn't the case. She simply sought out refuge at her friend Nakuru's home. It's been roughly a week since then. Since we are in different student years, I was a bit worried since we haven't seen each other a lot, but...

“...I see, so she's back.” I sighed in relief.

Yeah, I'm glad. Honestly speaking, I could never really calm down, even knowing that she was safe. She's my family's little monster after all. Even if she can easily beat me in a fight, not having her close to me is scary. I think this feeling is similar to having a friend take care of your pet for you. It felt like it left a hole open in my stomach. But, now she's home. I don't know what kind of change of mind she had, but I'm still happy.

“Alright...” I took off my shoes, and went up inside.

There's Konoe and Suzutsuki to worry about, but...for now, I'll go check up on my little sister. She's still family, even if she sometimes doesn't seem human. With these thoughts, I walked down the hallway. There, I could hear voices from Masamune's room. Putting my ear closer to the door, I heard Masamune and Kureha's voices

from the inside. I was curious as to what they were saying, so I didn't knock just yet.

"H-Hold on, Sakamachi! What are you doing here!?"

"Don't stop me, Usamin-senpai! These are my feelings!"

"F-F-Feelings!? Even if that's the case, you can't just suddenly do something like this..."

"Do you...not like this, Usamin-senpai?"

"M-Me not liking it...that's not the problem here..."

"Then it's fine, right! Just accept me! Accept my feelings!"

"Nooooooooooooooooooooo!?"

"....."

What are those two doing. What is my little sister doing to Masamune? 'My feelings'? 'Accept me'? These powerful words are going to break Onii-chan's heart, you know.

"...Urk."

Either way, I have a duty of observing the scenery beyond this door. I can't have my younger sister awaken to some weird interest, so I have to forcefully stop her if push comes to shove! As her older brother!

"...Alright." I put my hand on the door knob.

It's now or never. Go, even if it breaks me. I mean, Kureha might actually break my body depending on how the situation goes. But, I ignored this bad premonition, and opened the door—

Kureha had her forehead pressed on the floor, prostrating herself in front of Masamune.

"....."

Hold on, sister. Nii-chan really didn't want to see you like that.

“Nya!? Nii-san!?”

Kureha must have been scared to death by me opening the door, because she shot up. Even though it was Sunday, she was wearing her uniform. Maybe she had club today?

“Nii-san! What are you doing here!?”

“I'll throw those words right back at you!”

Showing me such a surreal scenery right after coming home...I really didn't want to see my little sister like that.

“T-This is...I just had a request for Usamin-senpai...”

“A request? Borrowing money?”

“Of course not!”

“Then, did you need someone to take up your debt? Hey, Kureha, Mom said to not do that before she left, right?”

“...Alright, calm down, Nii-san. You're confused, and I get it, so listen to me.”

“That most definitely is your fault!”

Of course I'd be confused. I walked in on my little sister prostrating herself on the floor. Maybe I should have her get checked out at the hospital as well, see if she's taken any steroids or other drugs.

“Um, Sakamachi, I think this is related to the stupid chicken, so maybe just explain everything to him?” Masamune threw in a helping hand, raising her upper body from her bed.

“Urk...R-Right.” Kureha showed a somewhat nervous response.

...It's related to me? Maybe that's why Kureha suddenly came home? She did talk about some request she had for Masamune.

“Um, Nii-san, I need your help with something.” Kureha fidgeted awkwardly, seemingly embarrassed.

And then, she looked up straight at me.

“—I want to go on a date with Konoe-senpai!”

“.....”

The moment I heard those words, I fully grasped that today was indeed the 21st of November—This day is cursed.

♀ × ♂

“Please! I beg you, Nii-san!”

“I get it! I get it already, so stop prostrating yourself like that!”

I frantically stopped my little sister, who was having a deep kiss on her forehead. Still, a date with Konoe, huh. Why...where did that come from...

“For now, explain your reason.”

“R-Reason?”

“Yeah. Why do you want to go on a date with Konoe?”

“T-That’s...B-Because...I like Konoe-senpai...”

Waaah, what a maiden-like response. Oh yeah, Kureha’s been head over heels for Subaru-sama since she met him. Well, as her older brother, I would surely support my little sister in her endeavour, but there is one problem separating them. Namely, Konoe Subaru is a girl. If their love were to succeed, they would set foot on the path of a forbidden love. It’s a perfect example befitting William Shakespeare’s original. Makes it even worse because Kureha doesn’t know about that.

“But, why are you asking me for help?”

“Um...let me explain myself.” She stayed quiet for a moment. “I want

both you and Usamin-senpai to support me so that the date becomes a success.”

“.....”

Support? Why would we have to do that? What kind of support can you even give someone on a date?

“Hey, Sakamachi, why did you ask us for that?”

Ohh, nice one, Masamune. She perfectly voiced the doubts I had. Also wait, she is still sick.

“You should get some rest, Masamune. It’ll only make your cold worse.”

“I-I’m fine. After getting some sleep, I’m feeling better now...Not to mention...”

“Not to mention...?”

“...I want to hear her out.” Masamune said, somewhat bashful.

I don’t think her face is red solely because of her cold.

“.....”

That surprised me. She really has opened up a lot. Compared to her cold and distant attitude from before, this is something you would never expect from her. She even had trouble dealing with Kureha before.

“But, I have a condition.”

Right as I was admiring Masamune, she had to ruin it again. There it is, the nasty rabbit I knew all too well. She still lives according to her give & take mentality. But, I wonder what it is? Masamune wouldn’t ask for money. Not like Kureha has any.

“Um...” Masamune showed a bashful expression. “You’re calling me ‘Usamin-senpai’, right?”

“Yes, correct.”

“Just once, could you call me by a different name...?”

“...A different name?”

“Y-You know, like you’re calling Suzutsuki Kanade!” She blushed even more aggressively.

.....Does she...want Kureha to call her ‘Onee-chan’, or something? I mean, that has to be it. Kureha calls Suzutsuki with ‘Onee-sama’ after all. She also mentioned that she always wanted a younger sister. But, to think she’d suddenly ask for that...Oh yeah, Masamune is still sick.

“I understand. If I call you that way, you’ll help me, right?”

“Yup! I’ll help you! I’ll do anything!” Masamune nodded with a grin.

...Her character is way too different... Does she want to be called ‘Onee-chan’ that badly? She’s like a rabbit going crazy for a carrot.

“Roger. It’s a bit embarrassing...but I’ll do it.”

“Y-Yeah...”

The two shared an awkward conversation. Kureha blushed ever so slightly, and opened up her mouth.

“Mommie!”

“Mommie!? Why!?”

“Eh, I mean, you told me to...”

“That’s not what I wanted!”

“Ah, I understand. You prefer Mama then?”

“Are you making fun of me!? Why would I be your mom!?”

Well, I get why Kureha would call her like that after this past month. She’s poor, so she tries to save as much money as possible, she always goes to every super sale at the supermarket, and is still pretty strong

despite that. Congrats, you're a proper housewife, Masamune.

"...Whatever. My head is starting to hurt because of this." Masamune let out a sigh, and held her head.

Since continuing this back and forth would only make her cold worse, I decided to step in.

"Also, why do you want our support in the first place? You were basically running away from home until today."

"Ah...E-Even I have times where I want to be alone, okay."

"So you stayed at Nakuru's place? Why not ask her for help in regards to the date?"

She's the president of the 'Watch Over Subaru-sama With A Warm Gaze' committee, so she should know how to win over Konoe.

"Nakuru is not good. She's got her own problems."

"Problems?"

"Something about 'The time has come to move this country forward!'."

"Problems in the head, yeah!?"

What the heck is she even talking about? Some revolution? I don't want to see election posters of hers hanging around. She'll probably hammer down a terrifying manifest .

"Nakuru is busy with her novel again. Something about a big project that will change the times."

"Yeah, probably about BL and glasses, right?"

"According to her, it'll be turned into children's literature or whatever."

"I seriously doubt that."

Not even Che Guevera attempted a revolution that messed up. Also, don't use BL and glasses in children's literature.

"That being the case, I came back to ask Usamin-senpai and Nii-san for help."

"Even if you ask us for that..."

"Not to mention...you two are going out, right?"

"....."

...I forgot. The Suzutsuki Revolution changed a lot. That day, which was named the Suzutsuki Revolution, just as Suzutsuki stated that she and Konoe were dating, Masamune also declared her relationship with me.

"That's why I want advice from Usamin-senpai."

"A-Advice?"

"Yes. Advice about love."

"Huh!? W-Why would I have to give you advice!?"

"Because you are dating Nii-san?"

"T-That's...!"

"By the way, who confessed first? Was it Usamin-senpai?"

"~~~!?"

Masamune blushed furiously like a ripe apple. I think she just remembered that Kureha is actually right.

"U-Um...what did you say to Nii-san when you confessed?"

"Eh...!? T-T-T-That's..."

"Usamin-senpai, this is very important to me. Please help me!"

"Urk..." Masamune bit her lip. "I-I told the stupid chicken..."

“...You told him...?”

“...! I-I said ‘I like you!’, okay! And then...”

“And then? What did you say after that?”

“U-Um...’I want to become your family!’, I think...”

“You want to be his family!? You said something so embarrassing!?”

“~~~!? S-Shut up already! I said it, so I can’t help it!” Masamune screamed in anger.

By the way, I felt the blood rushing to my head. I’m about to collapse and it’s not even from a fever...Damn that Kureha. To think she’d force Masamune into a second confession like that. It’s like a new torturing method from a foreign country. I can feel my HP dropping.

“So then? What did you do after the confession?”

“W-What do you mean...”

“Ah, Usamin-senpai, you did something, right?”

“!?”

“M-M-Maybe...a kiss...?”

“U-Urk...” Masamune reluctantly nodded.

“Kyaaaa~!” Kureha raised an excited shriek.

Eh? Me? Of course, I’m about to pass out.

“I had no idea...that you and Nii-san did something like that...”

“...Hey, Kureha! Get back to the main topic! What’s important right now is that we support your date, right!?”

“You’ll help me, Nii-san!?”

“Yeah, just ask for whatever you need.”

“Then, maybe we could talk more about Usamin-senpai’s confession...”

“No more of that!”

I will die. If you make me hear something so embarrassing, Masamune will die as well. She’s already suffering from a cold. Her fever will only go up.

“Usamin-senpai, will you help me?”

“Y-Yeah, I don’t mind.”

“Yay! Then, I’ll make sure to nurse you back to health first! Don’t you worry, I’m used to not catching a cold!”

“Y-Yay, I’m so happy...” Masamune showed a smile, but started sweating profusely.

I understand how she feels. If it was me, I most definitely wouldn’t want to be taken care of by Kureha. Expecting any common sense from this wrestling junkie is a waste of effort. After all, she’s my family’s little monster, and the reason for my gynophobia. She could not be further from your average girl.



“.....”

...But, why does she suddenly want to go on a date with Konoe? Is it because of the Suzutsuki Revolution? Normally, you'd be discouraged if the person you like suddenly has a lover, but to think she'd do the exact opposite...

“...Things changed, huh.” I muttered with a voice nobody could hear.

It's winter. Just as the seasons change, so do our relationships—or maybe who we are as a whole. During summer break, if my memory serves me right, I thought the following—Once the second term starts, our daily life will simply return back to normal.

“__”

Normal...A noisy and chaotic daily life. I've been thinking that, wishing for that. Since when?

“Stupid chicken, can I have a moment?”

There, as I was lost in my thoughts, Masamune pulled on my sleeve, whispering with a quiet voice.

“How was Suzutsuki Kanade like...?”

“Eh? Ah, well, she said that she wasn't too bothered by what you said.”

“.....I see. So she said that.” Masamune grew quiet.

“.....”

Maybe a big change has happened. Just like the seasons change, our relationships...

“Nyaa! Since I got help from both Nii-san and Usamin-senpai, I should decide on the day of the date!”

As if to brush away my thoughts, Kureha shouted with a lot of excitement.

“Kureha, deciding on the day is fine and all, but you need to figure out if Konoe has time.”

“I know that! Tomorrow at school, I'll invite Konoe-senpai!”

“Tomorrow...”

Since they live next to us, you could just go over there right now... Then again, maybe it might be hard to invite Konoe with Suzutski

around. She thinks that they are dating after all.

“Then, tomorrow.”

“Yup! I’ll try my best, Nii-san!” Kureha showed her usual and innocent smile.

Seeing that unparalleled face...I just wished for her to have fun on the date, while realizing that everything was about to change.

♀ × ♂

However, the following day, Suzutsuki and Konoe did not come to school. And the next day, and the day after, they didn’t come to school anymore.

Chapter 3: First Love Overdrive

It was the 5th of December, with two weeks having passed since Masamune's birthday, and the very first Sunday in December. In these two weeks, we've reached winter by quite a bit, and the temperature outside has dropped drastically. You could even see students walking to school wearing scarfs. Maybe I should hurry and prepare myself. But, the bigger problem is...

"...Will Konoe-senpai come today, I wonder?"

We stood on a small plaza near the train station. Because it was a school-free day, things were a bit more crowded than usual, as Kureha muttered these words. Indeed, today is the 5th of December, the day of the date. Naturally, I was talking about the date of Sakamachi Kureha and Konoe Subaru. Kureha wore a pink cardigan with a short skirt and knee-socks. I was worried if she was feeling cold because of her short skirt, but she probably really wanted to dress up for the date.

Right now, it was 2.35pm. She was supposed to meet Konoe at 3pm flat, so there's still some time left. As for why we're all gathered here...

"It's fine, Sakamachi. You texted Subaru-sama, right?" Masamune said, attempting to cheer up Kureha.

Over these past two weeks, Masamune had fully recovered from her cold. She even sounded a bit disappointed while saying '...A bit longer wouldn't have hurt', but a person's health is the most important.

"You better be thankful, I even helped you come up with the mail to write."

"Right...To think Usamin-senpai would check my mail to make it look more feminine..."

"W-What about it!? I did it for your sake! It's because you said 'I'm

too embarrassed to write Subaru-sama a mail!', okay!"

"Well, that is true...I didn't expect that Subaru-sama would be taking two whole weeks off at school..." Kureha said, letting out an exhausted sigh.

That's right, both Konoe and Suzutsuki did not come to school for the past two weeks. We grew worried and asked our homeroom teacher, who told us that they were both bedridden with a cold. Since Masamune caught a cold, it seemed plausible that it was just another seasonal thing...but I found that hard to believe.

—Let's meet again tomorrow, at school.

On a Sunday two weeks ago, this is what Suzutsuki told me. She didn't seem sick in the slightest back then, so her taking off two whole weeks seems off. I was curious, and went to visit them, only to be held back by Ichigo-san. She argued that it would be bad if I caught a cold, so she didn't let me in according to Suzutsuki's wishes. But...

"....."

Maybe I should have ignored Ichigo-san and forcefully barged into their apartment. After all, neither of them are coming to school. I had this odd feeling that it wasn't just a cold, but rather something else. And, I might have an idea—namely, Suzutsuki being unable to trust other people. Being told by Masamune, she probably received a bigger shock than expected, so she decided to take some time off school together with her butler Konoe.

"Hey, Kureha, how are Konoe and Suzutsuki doing? You asked them, right?"

"Yeah. According to Konoe-senpai, they're feeling a lot better now, and that they could probably come to school tomorrow. If they weren't any better, I'm sure that Konoe-senpai would have rejected my invitation today."

"...I see."

Well, if my assumption is correct, then I guess that they just can't

miss any more classes. Can't be seen as shut-ins after all.

"...I hope they come back to school soon." Masamune showed a somewhat complicated expression.

She probably still is worried about what she said to Suzutsuki before. As a result of that, even after she recovered from her cold, she was lacking her usual energy. Not to mention that she has yet to ask for the response to her confession. Maybe...she feels guilty? That's why she's probably forgetting about the confession until everything about Suzutsuki has revolved. It's almost like...she can't accept that only she can be happy.

"But, I'm surprised you managed to invite Konoe out on a date."

Even if Masamune helped with the mail, to think Kureha could be this bold.

"Don't worry, I came up with a proper reason." Kureha said.

"Hmm...Something like 'Please help me shopping'?"

"W-Well, something like that."

Kureha awkwardly averted her gaze. Hm, what's that attitude for? Is she hiding something from me? Thinking about it, both Masamune and Konoe were oddly panicky when it came to the plan. I mean, I was part of it mid-way, until they kicked me out, saying that only girls should be talking about it. When I was about to say 'Wouldn't a boy's opinion be valuable as well?', I remembered that Konoe was a girl, so it's two girls going out shopping.

"We have it all down. If something happens, we'll help you, Sakamachi." Masamune puffed out her chest, seeming confident.

Seeing her like that, I only grew more worried. The reason we were both here was to watch over Kureha's date with Konoe. That's why our job was to follow them. It genuinely makes me feel like we're stalking them. To think a day like this would come.

"But, what about topics to talk about and all that? Are you sure you can even make it feel like a date?"

“No worries. I put a hands-free phone into Sakamachi’s pocket, so she’ll be able to hear us during.”

“Is that really going to work out?”

“Nyahaha. No problem, Nii-san. After all, I came up with a plan for my date!”

“A plan, huh...”

No clue what kind of plan, but I’ll just pray that everything works out. It’d be the best if it ended without any big trouble.

“.....”

Still, a date, huh. It might be a bit late to think that, but I’m a bit surprised at Kureha’s actions. I never thought she was the type to actually work towards her love like that. Since she was only fixated on wrestling, she has practically no experience in love, and she never really tried to woo over Konoe until now. Not to mention the Suzutsuki Revolution that happened last month. Suzutsuki declared that she and Konoe were dating, and even kissed her. That’s why, Kureha should have no faith that she has any shot with Konoe. Yet, she invited her out on a date...

“.....”

Or, maybe she had another reason she desperately needed to invite Konoe like this?

“Ah, it’s time now. Nii-san, Usamin-senpai, go hide. Konoe-senpai can’t figure out that you’re here.” She smiled with a bright grin.

Maybe she’s trying to hide her tension, acting even more energetic than usual. Knowing her, she’s pretty nervous in front of Konoe.

“Alright, then, Sakamachi. I pray for your luck in battle.”

“Yes! Make sure to properly watch over me, that gives me much more power!”

They spoke like two soldiers who headed off into battle, and Masamune took her distance from Kureha. Naturally, I followed her. Still, ‘Watch over me’, huh. I guess she is nervous. Should be her first time going on a date with a boy.

“...Geez.”

Despite it being Kureha, she sure is acting feminine now. Can’t help it, I’ll watch over her. Having her rely on me was a breath of fresh air, and it made her look more adorable as well. As I was thinking that, both Masamune and I watched over Kureha from the corner of the plaza.

‘Ah...G-Good morning, Konoe-shenpai!’

‘Hey. Morning, Kureha-chan.’

From the phone, I could hear a clear alto voice. Naturally, that could only belong to Konoe. She wore her usual male clothes with a black vest, and tight pants. Well, Kureha doesn’t know that Konoe is a girl, so that choice is to be expected.

‘Konoe-senpai, have you recovered from your cold?’

‘Ah...Yeah, I’m feeling much better.’

I heard the conversation between the two from my phone that was connected to Kureha’s. Eavesdropping was successful. I guess Masamune’s plan was successful. By the way, I feel like this call is going to cost a whole lot, but recent services apparently allow you to get a family tariff.

“Stupid chicken, make sure that Subaru-sama doesn’t see us.”

“I know, I know.”

I whispered, as I hid behind the vending machine in the corner of the plaza. I’m starting to feel like a spy here. Well, with so many people around, it’ll be hard to see us.

‘...Hm.’

‘Huh? What’s wrong, Konoe-senpai?’

‘...Well, maybe it’s just my imagination, but it felt like somebody was watching us.’

I take that back, Konoe-san is far too sensitive. To think she’d catch on to our presence this quickly...She’s like an impala in the savannah.

‘A-Ahaha, it must be your imagination, Senpai. Maybe you’re still feeling a bit under the weather?’ Kureha showed an awkward smile, as she tried to provide a follow-up.

‘...Yeah, you might be right.’ Konoe showed a conflicted expression.

.....Maybe she’s still bothered by what I said two weeks ago? About how we should stop being best friends for a while. I mean, it’s my fault. Not to mention that both Konoe and Suzutsuki took two weeks off, and I was busy nursing Masamune back to health, so we couldn’t talk at all.

‘T-Then, Konoe-senpai, how about we get going?’

‘Got it. But, where are we going?’

‘No worries! Just as I said in the mail, I already planned out everything!’

Kureha still seemed a bit nervous, as she kept talking with a fast voice, walking on ahead.

‘Ah, wait for me, Kureha-chan!’ Konoe quickly followed after her.

“Now then, we have to follow them as well.”

“Y-Yeah.”

Uwah, Masamune sure seems motivated about this. She’s like a detective from a TV drama.

“Oh yeah, where is Kureha heading now?”

As we mixed in with the crowd, following them, I asked Masamune. Kureha walked down the street near the train station, with several stores everywhere. From what I heard, the person who came up with most of the plan today was actually Masamune, so she should know where we're heading.

"No need to rush, you'll figure it out soon enough."

"Hm. Well, what message did you have Kureha send to Konoe?"

"It was a simple 'Please help me with my shopping'. At first, we thought of going to the amusement park or the aquarium, but...that seemed a bit too hard for Sakamachi."

"Yeah, makes sense."

Whenever it comes to Konoe, Kureha is like a small animal facing a wild beast. If she went to any popular date spots with Konoe, I doubt she could handle it.

"That's why, I decided on a normal shopping trip for their first date."

"A safe choice, alright. But, what are they going to buy?"

"That's..." Masamune went silent for a moment. "A present for you."

"....."

Now hold on. I'm not following it at all. Why would Kureha and Konoe go out to buy a present for me?

"Hey! Don't give me such a perplexed look!"

"What did you expect!? Everybody would be surprised about this!"

"It was a genius idea! Listen, the mail Kureha sent to Subaru-sama went like this: 'I want to buy a present for Nii-san, could you help me choose one?', okay."

"That sure came out of nowhere."

"Can't help it, it's all a trick to get Subaru-sama to agree."

“A trick...”

Well, I get what she was plotting with this. Konoe and I were fairly close, and since Kureha knows what I like and don't like, she chose Konoe as the partner. This nasty rabbit really used me as bait for this. And curse Kureha for simply agreeing to that.

“But, wouldn't Konoe be suspicious if it came out of nowhere like that?”

“You think so? Sakamachi wrote ‘I want to thank Nii-san for his daily duties!’.”

“Daily duties?”

“Something about you being her punching bag.”

“I don't want any gratitude for that!”

What kind of cursed reason is that? If she was serious about that, then I definitely don't want a present. Just give me some sort of compensation fee.

“No worries, since Subaru-sama actually came here, it means that he believes her.”

“Not wrong, but...”

“Why not be a bit more happy? Whatever they're buying today will be an actual present for you.”

“Why!?”

“It'd be bad if Subaru-sama figured out that it was a lie, right? That's why she'll actually buy a present for you. The lie becomes the truth.”

“W-What sophism...It's all just nonsense.”

“What's the problem? Or, are you not happy? You're getting a present from your younger sister, right?”

“.....”

I felt a shiver running down my spine. Her taste is completely different from your average person. Same goes for Konoe. I really don't want a present from them.

“R-Right, so what are they going to shop for?”

“I told you...Just wait a bit. See, they're here.”

With Masamune's words, I turned my gaze back at the two. They reached the corner of the street, standing in front of a shop. The shop window was shining brightly, its outer colors filled with an innocent white. It looked comparatively big of a shop, filled with female customers...

“...Hold on now.”

A new and bright window, filled with objects that looked all too familiar—Sheep. They were plush toys of deformed sheep, with sharp teeth and a red mouth.....It's the Silent Sheep. That's right, it looked like the doctor out of a certain movie, still as popular as ever. As you may have guessed by my description, they reached a merch shop solely made for the Silent Sheep.

♀ × ♂

“Masamune! So that was your strategy!” Pointing at Kureha and Konoe walking inside the store, I screamed.

“W-What's the problem? It's the perfect place for a date, right? Subaru-sama loves that Silent Sheep after all.” The nasty rabbit showed a grin.

Damn it, it really is the right choice. Konoe loves that monster, and that's the reason Kureha came to like it as well once the second term rolled around. That's why, this is probably the most perfect spot for these two. But...

“Do you not like that sheep?”

“It just gives me the creeps.”

“Well, it is a surreal design, alright. But, isn't it fine? Not like you're

going to buy it.”

“But, I’ll get it as a present, right!?”

This is the worst. To think that day where I would have to keep this grotesque thing in my room would come this quickly. I might just get cursed at the end of the day. Ahh, all the sheep in this world are going to haunt me.

‘Nya~ So cute.’

‘Y-Yeah! You’re right!’

As I was feeling uneasy, I heard these excited voices coming from Konoe and Kureha. I’m happy that Konoe’s feeling a bit better now, but I still don’t know how to feel about this. Her taste couldn’t be farther from a male butler.

“Come on, let’s go as well. Just be careful not to get caught.”

“...Yeah yeah.”

Urged by Masamune, I followed her to the store. I’d really love to give the manufacturer of this cursed plush toy a complaint, but most terrifyingly enough, it’s actually been selling really well. Otherwise this whole place wouldn’t exist.

“Woah.”

The second we reached the entrance, I couldn’t hold back a shocked voice. I ran into a giant Silent Sheep costume. Damn, the size is no joke. It reminds me of the one Nakuru was wearing before, although it’s a bit smaller compared to then. I tried to ignore it and move on with my day...But the second the costume passed me, it felt like our eyes met.

“.....”

For some reason, it was oddly fixated on me the second I tried to walk inside. Wouldn’t even give me any flyers. I mean, not like I wanted one, but that stare is a bit creepy. Do I have something on my face?

“What are you doing? Let’s go.”

“Y-Yeah.”

Masamune’s voice forced me to take a step inside. Honestly speaking, I’m not feeling all too comfortable with this. After all, there’s really only female customers inside. It’s like I walked into the shoujo aisle at the bookstore. Something stopped me from calming down, making me feel embarrassed.

“Subaru-sama and the others are...Ah, over there!”

We hid in the shadow of a shelf, and locked on to Konoe and Kureha. Since the inside of the place was pretty spacey, we had no trouble hiding. Then again, they were completely engrossed with the sheep.

‘So Kureha-chan, we’ll be buying a present for Jirou here? Does Jirou like the Silent Sheep?’

‘Y-Yes! He’s completely fallen for this cutie!’

I heard their two voices from across the phone...Stop. Please, don’t twist my interests like that. I at the very least can’t stand this thing.

“...Ahh...what should I do if they give me a plush toy as a present...”

“Maybe you can use it as a punching bag? It’ll be a good stress relief, I bet.”

“I feel like I’ll only collapse from the stress instead...”

I probably will end up with insomnia just by having one in my room. Maybe I would have to get medicine for that somewhere down the line. What a horrible future, really.

“But, since we’re here already, I might just buy something myself.”

“Are you being serious right now!?”

“I mean, they might have some talismans.”

“These aren’t some Okinawa seashells!”

I personally wanted to escape from this hell as quickly as possible. To get a bit of a change of pace, I looked around inside the store. But, I couldn't find anything interesting. Or rather, everything in here just screams hell. All of the stuff in here is probably more like an evil item than a present. For example, look at this alarm clock. It was shaped like the Silent Sheep, with a woman's voice screaming 'Slaughter! Murderer!'. Rather than waking up, I'd probably get a heart attack and never wake up again.

Besides that, I spotted goods that would probably kill you in one way or another...and yet all the customers were looking around, even buying those goods, with such joy...Maybe they're part of some cult, all hypnotized?

"See, they're all happy. You never know what will end up popular."

"I feel like you should probably get your eyes checked out before buying this nonsense."

I was in shock at this mountain of Silent Sheep goods in front of me. Why are they selling this much? Maybe this country itself is rotten? Is the economy of this place going to be okay?

'Hmmm, I wonder which one would be the best?'

'Maybe this plush toy?'

'It is cute, but Nii-san isn't the type of person to gather plush toys.'

'Really...It's so cute though...'

'Hehe, Konoe-senpai, you can be quite feminine with your interests, I see.'

'...!? Y-You're wrong! I don't like cute things...!' Butler-kun blushed furiously, as she embraced the plush toy in her arms.

Seeing that, Kureha let out a snicker as well.



“.....”

Huh. This is going better than expected. Thinking about it, those two have met back in April, so they actually know each other quite a bit. From an outsider's perspective, they must look like junior and senior. I still don't know why Kureha suddenly brought up this date, but if they're having fun...

‘—A present for Jirou, huh.’

There, I heard a somewhat anguished alto voice. With a grieving expression, Konoe closely inspected the Silent Sheep.

‘Hm? Konoe-senpai, is something wrong?’

‘...No, I was just thinking that maybe I should give Jirou a present myself.’

‘...? Did something happen between the two of you?’

‘...No, not really.’ Konoe showed a smile devoid of any strength.

With that scenery in front of me, I felt pain deep inside my chest...So, Konoe really wants to make up with me, I guess? Of course, if it was possible, then I’d love to do so. I want to eat lunch with her like before, talk about this and that, and try to fix my gynophobia with her help. But...I can’t do that right now. I was the one who caused this distance between me and Konoe. I don’t know why, but Konoe is probably pondering about her relationship with me. That became clear during the conversation we had two weeks ago. And, it’s something that she can’t tell me about. That’s why—

“.....”

Maybe I really should keep that distance up a bit longer. That’s why I said what I said back then. But...

“H-Hey, stupid chicken?”

As I was lost in thought, Masamune suddenly tapped me on the shoulder.

“What’s wrong? Everything is going well with their date, right?”

“Y-Yeah, that’s not what I was on about...” Her voice was gently shaking. “Look behind you.”

“Behind?”

I listened to her and simply turned around. I didn’t think there’d be

anything special, simply the same hell full of Silent Sheep...

“Wha.”

The moment I caught on to that, I let out a groan. It was the costume from before, handing out flyers at the entrance. Now it suddenly watched us from the shadows of a shelf...No, it was staring at us.

“H-Hey, Masamune, did you drop something? You know, like they did in nursery rhymes.”

Oh wait no, that was a bear, not a sheep. That song talked about a bear living in the forest, bringing you an earring back. Maybe that’s just a polite employee trying to return something we dropped...

“...Huh?”

I turned towards Masamune in hopes of receiving an answer, but she simply started dashing out of the store, like she ran away from something.

“.....”

Man, I have a really bad feeling about this, haha. As cold sweat ran down my back, I looked behind me again—only to see that costume leap at me like a mad beast!

“.....”

Immediately, I kicked on the ground, and dashed out of the shop. Checking behind me, that nasty costume was chasing me. Lord help me, I’ll get eaten. My instincts were telling me that. That costume must be possessed or something. Can an employee please call an exorcist?

“Hey, Masamune! Don’t just leave me behind!” I chased after Masamune, screaming.

“S-Shut up! I can’t! I can’t deal with this! If it captures me, I’ll get eaten!” She screamed back at me.

Waaaah, she was thinking the same thing as me, huh. Also, what is

that speed? That thing is slowly closing in on us. Eventually, it'll catch up—

“Kya!?”

A shriek rang out, to which I saw Masamune tripping, as she ran next to me. Moron, why did it have to be now...!

“Damn it!” I stepped on the brakes, and turned around.

Now that it's come to this...No choice but to go ham. I can't just leave a girl behind to run away. At the same time, the Silent Sheep was closing in on us. Instinctively, I stretched out my fist for a jab, but...

“Guho!?”

As a counter, the costume just rammed itself right into my stomach. T-This bastard, it ducked beneath my fist to dodge my jab! Not to mention this counter...it's pretty skilled for being a mere costume. If it manages to get on top of me, I'll be at an overwhelming disadvantage.

“Hey now, Onii-chan, why're you suddenly running away from me, huh?”

There, I heard an all-too familiar anime voice.....Hold on, is the person inside possibly...

“Phew, sure's hot in this thing.”

Fully ignoring me and Masamune, who stood there frozen stiff, the person wearing the costume removed the head part like it was nothing. What appeared was semi-long silver hair, with the facial features of a doll. And then, the girl turned her eyes towards me.

“Yo, Onii-chan, Usamin, what a coincidence to run into you two here.”

“...I'm just as surprised, Schrö-senpai.”

That's right, this is Narumi Schrödinger. She's the club president of

Rouran Academy's handicrafts club, and the top-ranking girl in the club, known as the school's strongest, now smiling at me and Masamune.



♀ × ♂

“...Vice prez, what are you doing here?”

We stood in the street near the train station. With the Silent Sheep shop next to us, Masamune asked Schrö-senpai, who had taken off the costume and changed into her casual clothes. By the way, we haven't headed back to the store since we ran away. If we caused any more of a ruckus, Konoe might just spot us, so we escaped. Luckily, we could still hear their voices from the phone, and the date was still going strong.

"Hehe, I'm working part-time."

"Part-time?"

"That's right. I'm earning a bit of pocket money. Usamin should probably know, but it's a place affiliated with our company, so I had them give me some shifts."

"Why would you go out of your way to do that..."

"Ahaha, because it sounded interesting, of course. I wanted to wear this costume at least once~!"

".....Then why were you chasing us like that?"

"Seemed fun."

"It wasn't fun for us at all, okay!"

"Ahh, my bad, my bad. I just checked up on you in the beginning, but I wanted to prank you. Sorry, I got in the way of your date, right?"

"Wha...W-We're not on a date or anything..."

"Oh? Then what were you doing there?"

"T-That's..." Masamune bit her lip, going silent.

Schrö-senpai showed a grin.

"Oh yeah, Subaru-sama and Kureha also came to the shop, right."

"!"

"Were you following them by any chance?"

“A-Ah...” Masamune awkwardly pulled down the hem of her skirt, looking at me as she asked for help.

...Can't help it. I should throw in an explanation.

“The thing is, Kureha and Konoe are on a date right now.”

“Kureha is? Oh yeah, she had feelings for Subaru-sama, right.”

“You knew?”

“I'm not the vice president of the club for nothing, okay. So, you two came here to watch over her?”

“Something like that.”

“Huh, gotcha. I get what's going on. Still, Kureha on a date, huh... That's a bit unexpected.” Schrö-senpai muttered.

So she agrees, huh. I also think that the timing of inviting Konoe on a date is a bit weird. Maybe she really had a particular reason.

“—Ah, this is bad.”

There, as I was lost in thought, Masamune pulled me away from the front of the store. Kureha walked out of the store with Konoe at the side, carrying a small plastic bag.

“Masamune, what about the plan from here on out?” I asked, as we hid in the shadows of a nearby parked car.

“Um...” Masamune grew silent for a moment. “Since they're already here at the plaza, they should go for some tea at a cafe...is what I thought.”

“Huh. So you came up with their date plan, Usamin.”

“...Vice prez, why are you grinning like that?”

“No reason, really. Just thought you really opened up a lot. To think you'd come up with a date plan for your junior, you know.”

“~~~! I-It's not that big of a deal, really. She just asked me to help,

so I..." Masamune awkwardly fidgeted with her body, responding.

Well, it is true. This is something the old Masamune would have never done. You could say that she has opened up her heart.

"By the way, do you not have to get back to work, Vice Prez?"

"Hmmm, I wonder. I've been working the entire morning today, so it's about time for me to leave. I could just go home, but..." Schrö-senpai looked at the backs of Konoe and Kureha. "Hey, Usamin, Onii-chan. Can I tag along with you two?"

"Eh? I don't mind, but...You can't get in their way, okay?" Masamune blinked in confusion.

"Don't you worry, I won't do something like that. Just..."

"...Just?" Masamune asked, to which Schrö-senpai showed concern with "There's something I'm curious about."

Then, she turned towards me.

"You're fine with it as well, right, Onii-chan?"

"Y-Yeah, no problem here."

"Thanks a bunch. Then, let's go. Can't lose them, right?" Schrö-senpai said, and carefully followed Konoe and Kureha.

Pulled along, we followed her...This sure has gotten weird, alright. To think even Schrö-senpai would tag along. Is she that curious about how the date turns out? Well, as the senior in this scenario, maybe she just hopes for her junior's love to bloom.

"By the way, Usamin." Schrö-senpai spoke up with a serious voice. "You said that they'd drink some tea next, right?"

"Ah, yes. That's part of the plan I came up with."

"Hmm. Then, isn't this a bit weird?"

"...What do you mean?" Masamune asked, to which Schrö-senpai

continued with a sincere expression.

“I mean, they just walked into a park.” She pointed at their backs.

I was confused and looked back at the two, and just as Schrö-senpai stated, they had just walked into a public park.

“Eh...You’re kidding, right? That’s not what I told Sakamachi...” Masamune seemed quite bewildered at this herself.

Naturally, I was the same. Why did she walk into a public park of all places? With the arrival of Schrö-senpai, I didn’t pay much attention to what they were talking about on the phone.

“What should we do, Onii-chan?” Schrö-senpai asked me.

A moment of silence passed.

“...Let’s follow them.” I said, and set foot inside the park.

Something inside of me forced me to do so.

♀ × ♂

It was actually quite the spacey park. Maybe because of its close location to the train station, or maybe because it was a school-free day, a lot of families and couples were sitting on the grass or on the wooden benches. There were even some children feeding the pigeons at the water fountain in the center.

In one corner of this park, there were Konoe and Kureha, sitting on a bench. At the same time, the three of us hid in the shadows of a small forest, allowing us to watch them from afar. And, the phone allowed us to listen in on them.

‘Kureha-chan’. I heard an alto voice, belonging to Konoe. ‘What did you want to talk about?’

‘Yes, um...’ Kureha grew silent.

...Something she wanted to talk about? That’s why she brought her here? If it was anything simple, a cafe would have done the trick, so

maybe it's something other people aren't supposed to hear. This would be the perfect place for that.

‘—Konoe-senpai, can I ask you something?’ Kureha spoke up with a serious tone. ‘Did something happen between you and Nii-san?’

‘.....’

Hearing those words, Konoe swallowed her breath.

‘...I knew it. Something felt off when we were buying the presents before, so I was curious.’

She must have confirmed it as she looked at Konoe. Because of that, Kureha continued with a somewhat saddened tone.

‘Did you...fight?’

‘.....No, Jirou and I aren't exactly fighting. It's just...’

‘It's just?’

‘.....’

Another silence, broken by Konoe.

‘—I'm the one at fault, I think.’ She declared it, like a confession of her own sin.

‘...What do you mean?’ Kureh asked.

‘Exactly what I said. I'm the one to be blamed. I was having trouble with something lately...’

‘...And that is related to Nii-san?’

‘.....’

‘...If that is the case, then why don't you ask Nii-san for help? If it involves him, that would be your best bet.’

‘...Sorry, but I can't do that...’

‘Why?’

‘Because...’ Konoe spoke that far, only to suddenly flash a smile devoid of any strength. ‘Yeah, I can’t...I’m so pathetic. Maybe it would all be better if I just told Jirou like I am telling you right now. But...I don’t have the courage for that. To the point I hate myself.’

‘.....’

‘That’s why I’ve kept it all to myself, thinking about it...and the situation got worse. I tried to resolve everything...but I caused trouble for my lady and even Jirou.’

‘...’

‘That’s why...I’m the one at fault.’ She sounded defeated, like she was about to break out in tears.

“.....”

I almost ran over towards her. I wanted to see her, and hear her out. But, I was forced to swallow this desire. As I thought, she really was thinking about our relationship. But...

“...Damn it.”

I couldn’t run after all. The words I told her two weeks ago popped up in my head. I was the one who said that, so what am I supposed to do? I was the one who wanted time. Time to think about all of this. About me and Konoe. As well as Suzutsuki and Masamune. What could I say here to make things better?

‘It’s fine.’

What reached my ears was undoubtedly my little sister’s voice.

‘No need to be so harsh on yourself, Konoe-senpai.’

‘...Kureha-chan?’ Konoe raised her head, being met with Kureha’s gentle smile.

‘You’re not at fault, Konoe-senpai. It’s fine.’

‘.....’

‘I don’t know what you are worrying about, having trouble with, so it just might sound like I’m trying to cheer you up with empty words, but that’s not the case. After all...Everybody goes through something like this.’

She spoke like this was nothing special.

‘Everybody has something they worry about, something they are troubled with, and even fail at. But, that’s something we all go through, so you’re not alone.’

‘.....’

‘Even I’m the same. Feeling restless about something, worrying all night. I try my best, and it still doesn’t work out sometimes. But, it’s important to get up again, right?’

‘.....’

‘Boys and girls...everybody bumps into a wall at one point, and thinks about giving up. But, you can’t break. Get up again, and start walking...’

‘.....’

‘Nyaha, this is what Mom told me a long time ago. It’s like our family’s motto. I’m sorry, Konoe-senpai, I just sound all arrogant with nothing to back it up.’ Kureha showed a bashful smile.

Konoe joined in as well, and spoke up.

‘...No, you’re not wrong, Kureha-chan.’ She said. ‘The one who’s wrong...is me.’

‘Konoe-senpai...’

‘Not to mention, it feels like I got back some of my confidence thanks to you. Like I figured out what I had to do...So, thank you, Kureha-chan.’

‘N-No, you don’t need to thank me, I just told you what Mom always said to me.’ Kureha showed a bashful smile.

...Yeah, I feel like she told me something similar before. That was back when I was still a young boy, and talked about something like this with Mom. Honestly speaking, I didn’t really understand her words back then. I couldn’t imagine a time where I’d have trouble over something, and still end up failing. Rather, I thought that someone like that sure was lame...and basically only looked down on others. But when I told Mom about this, she said—‘One day will come a time where even you understand it’.

“.....”

It’s weird. How could I have forgotten? Why did I not remember it until now?

‘Now, let’s go home, yeah? Sky’s gotten dark already.’ Konoe said, as she looked up at the sky.

Checking the large clock in the park, it was already half past 4pm, and darkness started to grow darker. Days have been a lot shorter recently, as the season has changed. The footsteps of winter have come closer.

‘Nyahaha, thank you very much for today, Konoe-senpai.’

‘It’s no problem at all. I simply helped with your shopping. If anything, I should be thanking you...’

‘No no, that’s not the case. After all...I had a lot of fun being with Konoe-senpai today.’ Kureha said with a beaming smile.

And then...

‘Um...Konoe-senpai, there’s actually one more thing.’

‘...? Sure, what’s up?’

The two stood up from the bench, and continued their conversation. Konoe had a somewhat bewildered look on her face. She probably was confused as to what Kureha was talking about. I’m the same, of

course, as well as Masamune and Schrö-senpai. Everybody's attention gathered on Kureha—

‘Phew...’ She took a deep breath, and turned her back towards Konoe.

Finally, after she gathered a bit of distance from Konoe, she turned around.

‘—I like you.’

That's all she said, and yet all of us were at a loss for words. Besides us, other people were still present in the park, but it felt like all ambient sound had vanished, silence filling the air. But, Kureha shattered all of that.

‘I like you, Konoe-senpai.’

♀ × ♂

It was a confession. No matter how you looked at it, those words Sakamachi Kureha uttered towards Konoe Subaru were a confession in every sense of the word.

“.....”

Ahh, I see. That's why she suddenly invited Konoe out on a date. It was all for this confession alone. All so that she could properly clear up her own feelings, after that whole Suzutsuki Revolution. I know that what Suzutsuki said back then was just nonsense, but the same couldn't be said about Kureha. That's why she must have been thinking about this a lot.

“.....”

No, that's not all. Thinking about it, I always thought that this current life would always stay the same. At the same time, I assumed that my little sister would never change either. I always thought that she would hold one-sided feelings for Kureha. However, reality is different. Everything in this world changes. Sooner or later, Kureha naturally would confess to Konoe. They met in April, and she has

liked Konoe ever since—Liked the crossdressing butler Konoe Subaru.

‘—Sorry.’ An alto voice spoke up from the phone.

It was undoubtedly Konoe’s voice. And, it surely was an answer towards Kureha’s confession.

‘...Sorry, Kureha-chan, I’m really...really happy to hear that, but...I can’t answer your feelings.’ She said, with a clear intent in her voice.

Everybody present knew what these words meant.

‘...Nyahaha.’

However, Kureha still smiled. She kept up her innocent expression despite these circumstances.

‘Don’t apologize, Konoe-senpai. I kind of knew that things would end up this way.’

‘...Kureha-chan.’

‘That’s right. I knew already. After all...You have someone you like as well, right?’

‘.....’ For a second, Konoe swallowed her breath. ‘Kureha-chan, I...’

‘No, it’s fine. I knew the result, but I still feel a lot better now. Like a weight has been lifted off my chest.’

‘...Kureha-chan.’ Konoe called out her name once more.

Hearing that, Kureha showed a satisfied smile.

‘Now then, Konoe-senpai! Thank you very much for tagging along today! It was a lot of fun! I won’t ever forget this day!’

It was too clear of a farewell. She left these words behind, turned her back towards Konoe, and ran directly out of the park.

‘Urk...!’

Konoe showed intention of chasing after Kureha, but eventually

stopped. She probably knew that there was nothing she could do even if she did. However...

“Ah, stupid chicken! Where are you going!?”

I didn't respond to Masamune's scream, and simply ran after Kureha. Konoe might have already spotted me by now. However, we're talking about my little sister here, there's something that urged me to chase after her.

“—Kureha!”

I dashed out of the park, and on the street, I immediately spotted Kureha. Almost like she was waiting for me, she simply stood still, and called out to me with her usual innocent smile.

“Hey, Nii-san.”

“...Yo.”

“Did you hear my confession?”

“...Yeah.”

“Ehehe...I got rejected.”

“...Yeah. But, you did your best.”

“...Yup. I was so nervous. I think I really gave it my all. It's what I had to do. I had to tell Konoe-senpai about my feelings. After all—I'll continue to like Konoe-senpai.” She declared with no hesitation in her voice, smiling as always.

However, her voice was slightly quivering.

“Hey, Nii-san.”

“...What is it?”

“Did you hear what I told Konoe-senpai before that?”

“About what Mom said? Yeah.”

“Exactly. I don’t think that she’s wrong. Everybody suddenly bumps into a wall that seems impossible to overcome. And sometimes we really can’t break it down.”

“...”

“But...What’s important is that you keep going after that. It sounds simple, but you need to overcome it eventually. Everybody has a time like that in their lives. That’s why...”

A warm sensation touched my body. It was Kureha, hugging me. Because she had her face buried in my chest, I couldn’t fully make out her expression.

“I-I also...will get up eventually, so...just for a bit, can I take a rest?”

“...Yeah.”

“...Just a bit, okay? I’ll get up, and start walking again, so...just...a bit...”

“...Don’t worry. I’m right here.” I gently embraced the small girl in my arms.

“_____”

That moment, Kureha was crying. Like everything stored up in her chest was gushing out at once, she just buried her face in my chest and let it all out, screaming in agony. That...was probably the end of my little sister’s first love.



Chapter 4: Her Style

“...Stupid chicken. Is she okay?”

At night, as the sky had turned dark, Masamune called out to me with a worried voice.

“Yeah, she’s fine. She won’t break that easily.” I said, and turned my neck to look at the girl behind my back.

She was indulging in a pleasant slumber right now. After Kureha was rejected by Kureha, I brought that crybaby to a nearby cafe. Basically, it was like a party to cheer her up. She stuffed herself with food to the utmost limit with the cake menu, eating sweets in great masses.

“Well, I didn’t expect her to eat this much, though.”

I tried to act like a reliable older brother, but Kureha just said ‘I need this one today!’, not allowing me to object. So, all she did for the past few hours was stuff cake down her throat, turning into a cake eating machine. As a result of that...

“Mmmnnn...Nii-san...” I heard a faint mumble behind my back.

With her stomach full, Kureha fell asleep at the cafe, so I now have to carry her home on my back. Maybe she was just exhausted from all that crying...Either way, she really takes a lot out of me, this little sister of mine. Well, right now, we were heading for Schrö-senpai’s place. I completely forgot, but Kureha had her clothes and other luggage at Schrö-senpai’s place, so somebody had to take her there. Can’t have Schrö-senpai take care of all of that, so I carried her.

By the way...Konoe Subaru was not with us. After catching up with me and Kureha, Masamune told me that Konoe failed to chase after us, only sitting on that bench. Maybe she had caught on to us following her. But, I understand how she feels. If I was in the same position as Konoe, I don’t think I would have been able to chase after Kureha. Konoe must have been shocked in her own right.

“Still, that surprised me.” Schrö-senpai commented, as she walked ahead of us.

“...Same here. To think that Kureha would confess like that.”

It all came out of nowhere. Of course, I knew that she had feelings for Konoe, but a sudden confession like that...

“.....”

No, it wasn't all that sudden. There have been enough triggers for it. The Suzutsuki Revolution must have stirred something inside of her, which led to this confession. She managed to deal with her own feelings, and received a proper conclusion that will let her move forward. To us, it might have been surprising, but Kureha had thought about this a lot...

“...No, that's not what surprised me.”

However, Schrö-senpai denied those words with a serious tone. And then, she turned towards the person sleeping on my back.

“She's...actually pretty strong.”

“...Eh?” I was confused.

Strong? I mean, she's a wrestling maniac, so I knew that she was strong, but...

“Hey now, I'm not talking about her battle strength. Her mental strength.”

“Mental?”

“Yeah. I'm sure the shock of being rejected by Subaru-sama must have been big...to the point that she probably wouldn't get up easily.”

“.....”

“But, I'm sure she'll be fine. She ate that much cake at the cafe, so she'll cheer up soon enough. She cried loudly, so she'll get up soon

enough. As long as she can get over her feelings, that is.”

“Get over her feelings...”

That’s right. Just as Kureha said, everybody runs into a wall once. What’s important is that you get up again, and start walking again. Get over her feelings, and start anew. That’s what Schrö-senpai probably wants to say. Being able to get up from a failed love needs a lot of strength, and Schrö-senpai said that Kureha possessed that.

“Your little sister’s amazing. It will probably be a bit awkward for her to run into Subaru-sama for a while, but she should at least be able to go to school.”

“Well...it is very much like her, I guess.”

Even I thought she’d be sad about being rejected, but things are different. When she hugged me, she clearly said it. She just needs a bit of rest so that she can get up again.

“.....”

I’m sure that Kureha herself understood the meaning behind the words she just told me. No matter how tough the wall may seem, we eventually have to get over it. Get up again, and start walking. That’s why she hugged me like a normal girl would—

“Stupid chicken, are you okay? Should I carry her?” Masamune called out to me with a worried voice.

“I’m fine. She did eat a lot, but she’s still light.”

“...No, that’s not what I meant.” Masamune denied my words.

“You’ve been carrying her this entire time, right?”

“Yeah? What about it?”

“I mean, you okay? After all...She’s a girl, remember?”

“...Ah.”

I see. I completely forgot about my gynophobia. Just by touching

another girl, my nose will start bleeding. And, Sakamachi Kureha undoubtedly is a girl. Although I'm carrying her on my back, there's no direct skin contact between the two of us. However, the me from before might have suffered some symptoms already by now. I guess it's thanks to the treatment I've been getting from the girls that I can stay like this.

“...”

Yeah, that has to be it. Since this April, I've gotten used to interacting with girls. But, that's not the only reason.

“Nya...Nii-san...I can't eat anymore...” Kureha mumbled something in her sleep.

Maybe she's the reason why? Just as the name gynophobia suggested, I feel fear of girls. Who pushed this fear onto me? Clearly, the women of the Sakamachi Family. They, who are absorbed in wrestling, have been using me as a punching bag for over ten years. I'm sure that I must have subconsciously feared Mom and Kureha. After all, I kept calling her the family's little monster. It's because I was afraid of her, and this caused my gynophobia. However...

“.....”

The scenery just now popped back into my head. She clung to me, crying like a child. What, so she's just a normal girl after all? Little monster? Gynophobia? I simply didn't understand her. When she clung to me, she didn't seem like the symbol of fear. Rather, it was the exact opposite.

“.....”

Not to mention, there's something else catching my attention. It's what Kureha said. After she was rejected by Konoe, she said—Konoe had someone she likes. Now, as for what she meant by that...

“...We're here. This is the Narumi estate.” Schrö-senpai's voice interrupted my thoughts.

Looking around my surroundings, what first entered my vision—was a fully-fledged mansion. However, it's different from the Suzutsuki

residence, and it was more of a classical Japanese estate.

“H-Huge...”

It looked like the type of estate you’d see in a historical stage play, which caused Masamune to stutter in shock. Is this her first time coming here?

“Onee-chan!”

As I was thinking that, I heard a familiar voice. Because it was pretty dark, I couldn’t tell too well, but those cat ears and glasses left enough of an impression. It’s Narumi Nakuru, and as soon as she spotted Schrö-senpai, she came running over.

“Yo, Nakuru, I’m back.”

“You’re going at your own pace as always, huh. If you’re late, at least call...Wait, why are Senpai and the others with you?”

Nakuru spotted me and Masamune, showing a somewhat perplexed expression. It’s weird, I haven’t heard her speak politely like this in a while. Those two sisters actually had been quite distanced for a long time, but during the sports festival back in September, that was resolved. She even stopped speaking politely towards Schrö-senpai. Also, was she worried about her older sister by any chance? If so, then they sure have gotten closer a lot.

“How cruel! You bully, Onee-chan! You were having fun with Senpai and the others, leaving me out!?”

“What kind of fantasies are you having!?”

Nevermind, I take it back...No, calm down, Sakamachi Kinjiro. The fact that Nakuru can tell her older sister her opinion clearly shows their progress.

“Hey now, calm down. I wasn’t leaving you out or anything. I just happened to run into them on my way home from work.”

“Eh, really?”

“Your misunderstandings are no joke as always.”

“That is Nakuru’s speciality after all!”

“Well, I guess you’re right. I don’t like how straightforward you are.”

“Ehehe, same here. Nakuru loves how Onee-chan can’t be honest at all~”

“Wha...Shut up! Don’t treat your older sister like some tsundere! Also, don’t just throw around words like love as if it’s nothing!”

“Wha? Why?”

“B-Because...it’s embarrassing...”

“Ehehe, love you Onee-chan!”

“Funya!? S-Stop that! Don’t cling to me like that!”

“Ehh, even though your skin is so smooth, and your cheeks so fluffy?”

“U-Using some nonsensical logic again...!”

Schrö-senpai acted like a stray cat not used to human affection, trying to push away her younger sister...Well, should be fine. It’s a bit too close for sisters’ skinship, to the point that a stranger might just report them for public indecency, but this is most likely just Nakuru’s way of wanting to be spoiled.



Next to me, Masamune muttered ‘How nice...’ in the face of this scenery, showing that she really wanted a little sister after all. Why not just hug Schrö-senpai like Nakuru does? Her looks and attitude really strengthen her little sister power.

“Ehehehe...Huh? Oh yeah, why is Senpai carrying Kureha-chan?”

Nakuru stopped clinging to Schrö-senpai for a moment, as she

glanced at Kureha, who was still on my back. Ah, crap. It's so obvious, but she doesn't know about Kureha's confession, and that she got rejected. But, that is something we shouldn't be telling her ourselves.

"...Mmm? Nakuru...?"

As I was racking my brain, Kureha woke up with great timing. The ruckus between Nakuru and Schrö-senpai must have woken her up.

"Um...where is this? Why is Nii-san carrying me?"

"This is Schrö-senpai's place. You fell asleep at the cafe, so I carried you here."

"Cafe..." Kureha muttered as she went through her memories, and nodded. "Ahh, right."

With these words, she got off my back.

"Huh? Kureha-chan, your eyes look a bit red, did something happen?"

"Eh...Um..." Kureha went silent.

However, Schrö-senpai came to the rescue.

"For now, let's just have dinner. You and Nakuru must be hungry, right?"

"Vice captain..."

"Huh? Come on, Kureha, don't show me that kind of face. You'll stay over tonight as well, so just come in already."

"....."

"...Thank you very much." Kureha faintly muttered after hearing Schrö-senpai's words.

...Maybe she's trying to be considerate of Kureha? Telling Nakuru about the failed love of Kureha on the same day is a bit tough, so she

just played it off. I don't think that Kureha would be so hungry after stuffing herself with cake a few hours prior.

“.....”

But, that's fine. Eventually, Kureha will tell Nakuru about her broken heart. They're pretty close after all. She just needs some time.

“Ah, right, why don't you two come join us as well, Onii-chan, Usamin?”

“Eh...us too?”

“Ohh! What a wonderful idea! Let's do that, Usamin-senpai! The more people, the better the food will taste!”

“That might be true, but...”

Masamune hesitated for a moment, glancing over at me.

“Ain't it fine? We should just take up Schrö-senpai's invitation.”

She probably felt uncertain because she didn't want to be a burden, but I bet it'd be fun.

“Then, come on in~!” Nakuru beckoned us inside.

Both Kureha and Masamune followed after her with a smile. Hence, I was about to move after them, when...

“Stop, Onii-chan.”

Suddenly, someone grabbed my arm. Looking over, it was Schrö-senpai. Not to mention with quite the strong force.

“You come shopping with me.”

“...Shopping?”

“Yeah. Just to the nearby convenience store. Should be fine, right?”

“Ehm, yeah, I don't mind...”

“Gotcha. Nakuru, we’ll go out shopping for a bit. We might end up a bit late, so just eat dinner without us then.” Schrö-senpai said, and before even waiting for Nakuru’s response, she pulled my body outside, in front of the house.

“Hey, you don’t need to drag me along like this!” I screamed.

“Oh, my bad.” Schrö-senpai swiftly let go.

“Also, what will we buy anyway?”

Maybe they ran out of ingredients? But, why with me...

“Ahh, that? That was just a lie.”

“...Excuse me?”

That came out of nowhere, I didn’t know how to react for a second... Hold on, then where is she heading right now?

“Hey, Onii-chan.”

Beneath the night sky, Schrö-senpai looked up at me, and flashed a smile like it was created by a sculptor.

“Let’s go on a date, shall we?”

♀ × ♂

Tsukishiro Shrine was a few minutes away from Narumi’s place. Schrö-senpai took me to this average shrine you could find anywhere.

“Now, we’re here. No people here tonight, but the moon is quite the sight, you know?”

After going up the stone stairs to the shrine, Schrö-senpai explained this with the large red shrine gate behind her...No, that’s not what I wanted to ask, okay.

“...Schrö-senpai, why did you bring me here?”

“Hm? I told you, it’s for a date.”

“You did say that, but...”

Why would you go on a date with me? Not to mention a shrine. I don't have any intention of throwing my valuable change into the offerings box.

“Ahh, don't worry about the location. I just wanted to be alone with you.”

“...Alone with me?”

“That's right, there's something I wanna talk about with you, Onii-chan.” She walked down the stone path through the shine gate, with her back to me. “Did something happen lately?”

She asked like it was nothing, and it came out of nowhere.

“What do you mean...”

“Hell if I know. That's why I'm asking. Right now, something's weird with you, Onii-chan.”

“...Me?”

“Yup. Specifically, it's like you're lacking your usual energy, worrying about something. It felt like Subaru-sama was off as well.”

“.....”

Hearing her words, I could only grow silent. I see...she's seen Kureha and Konoe on the date, so she must have heard what Konoe said.

—*I'm the one at fault.*

That's what Konoe said. And, that clearly showed that she was worrying about something related to me. Yet...

“I don't mind hearing you out, you know?” Schrö-senpai turned around, her eyes looking directly at me. “I was in your care during the sports festival back in September, and I'm a third-year, I gotta hear out the troubles of my juniors.”

“.....”

Her words sounded so unbelievably reliable. Simply listening to them made it feel like something inside of me shattered. Ahh...Maybe I was just tired? Thinking about it, it felt like way too much happened since the second term began. And with all of that, our relationships changed. Konoe, Suzutsuki, Masamune, and me—especially the relationship between me and Konoe changed greatly, our distance widened. I tried my best to come up with ways of resolving this, but the more I thought about it, the worse it got...to the point it limited my own actions.

“Schrö-senpai.”

That’s probably why I started telling her, as if to let everything out inside my chest.

“The thing is...I got into something like a fight with Konoe recently.”

“Something like a fight?”

“...I said that we should stop being best friends...”

“Best friends...huh. Well, you two were pretty close, so it wouldn’t be weird to have that kind of relationship. But, why would you say that?”

“That’s...”

It was clear as day to me.

“Konoe seemed like she was worrying about something...and that is related to me. But, I didn’t know why, and Konoe wouldn’t tell me. If anything, the more I stayed with her, the more she’d be worrying about it...and it felt like I was hurting her.”

That’s why I said what I said. Back then, we were both hiding something from each other. I didn’t tell Konoe about what happened between Masamune and Suzutuski, and Konoe kept the reason she was worrying a secret as well. We were supposed to be best friends, so I...

“I see, so you didn’t want each other to keep secrets, and hurt each other.”

“No, I just...”

I couldn’t argue against those words. I didn’t want to hurt Konoe. But...

“.....”

Was that really all of it? Maybe I also didn’t want to get hurt myself? After all, Konoe Subaru is the girl I confessed to, the girl I liked. That’s why I kept this vague distance between us?

“You said you wanted to stop being best friends...right?” Schrö-senpai said, and suddenly closed the distance between us.

And then, right as she was in front of my eyes, she stopped. A moment of silence passed, and—

“...!?”

A palm appeared in my view. It was Schrö-senpai’s small palm, slamming right onto my cheek. She gave me a slap like you’d see in a romcom series where the protagonist walks in on the girl changing. However, in this case, things are different. After all, this is Narumi Schrödinger. She’s the top rank of Rouran Academy’s handicrafts club, as well as the vice club president. She showed her inhumane strength back at the sports festival already, even beating Kureha greatly. And now, such a person slapped me right across the face—

“Ugh...!?”

Like I was shot, my body was flung backwards, landing on the stone path. I somehow managed to land safely, but the pain made my cheek feel numb.

“.....”

What the hell was that? Why did she slap me?

“...Hey, Onii-chan.”

As I was left baffled, Schrö-senpai grabbed my collar, pulling me up, and her face closer. And then—

“Let me tell you, Onii-chan. About what you’re doing right now.” Schrö-senpai spat her harsh words at me. **“You’re just running away.”**

“.....”

For a moment, I couldn’t grasp what I was just told. Running away? Me? From what? However, Schrö-senpai continued before I could ask for an answer.

“Today, do you remember what Kureha said? Everybody runs into a wall at some point, but you can’t stay down forever. Yet, you’re doing the exact opposite. You avoid the idea of getting up again altogether.”

“...T-That’s...”

Not the case—I wanted to say that. But, those words just wouldn’t come out of my mouth.

“That’s why you said that to Subaru-sama, right? That you wanted to stop being best friends. Because keeping a distance from him would be better, keeping space between you and him. You’re just making up a reason to run away from everything.”

“B-But, I...”

I didn’t know why she was worrying about me. I didn’t want us to hide things from each other. That’s why I didn’t want us to keep hurting each other.

“Can’t accept it? Alright, then let me ask you a question.” Schrö-senpai looked me directly in the eyes. “Are friends not allowed to keep secrets?”

“Wha...”

“I mean, think about it. Everybody has something they don’t want others to know. Isn’t that obvious?” She spoke like it was a natural conclusion.

.....Thinking about it, that might be true. Everybody has a side to them they don’t want others to see. But...

“But...me and Konoe are...”

We’re best friends. That’s why I didn’t want us to hide things from each other...

“...Alright, let me change the question.”

“...Huh?”

The topic of conversation suddenly switched, leaving me bewildered again. However, Schrö-senpai didn’t mind me, and continued.

“This so-called best friend relationship you guys have—is it that shallow that it could break apart because of a secret or two?”

“.....” I grew silent.

Before hearing my response, she screamed.

“It’s not, right!? If you’re best friends, you wouldn’t break apart because of something like that, yeah!?”

“.....”

“If you two are best friends, then you would stay with him even if he’s hiding something! Think about his feelings! Accept them! And, then protect him! If you can’t even do that, then don’t call yourself his best friend!”

“.....”

“You’re just running away! Just staying on the ground after running into a problem! Learn a bit from your sister! She was beat down, and is already trying to move forward, you know!?”

“.....”

I remember. That's right, Konoe was different. She cried, and clung to me, but didn't try to run away. No matter how long it took, she was prepared to get up again.

“.....”

So, what about me? Just as Schrö-senpai said, I was just running away, right? I wanted time. I wanted distance. And I thought it would benefit the both of us. But...it was just an excuse. I was just running away from Konoe Subaru.

“.....”

No, not just Konoe. I was probably running away from Suzutsuki as well. Over the past two weeks, she hasn't come to school. Ichigo-san mentioned a cold, but I know that it's just nonsense. Yet, I didn't do anything. I used Ichigo-san as a reason to not enter her room, and stayed away. I was just—scared, right? I didn't have faith in myself, hesitated, and kept running away.

“...What's wrong, Onii-chan?” Her voice sounded like she was close to crying.

Compared to her screams before, her voice now was devoid of any strength. And even so, she continued.

“Onii-chan...is a lot cooler than this.”

“.....”

“I'm not telling you to become some hero out of a manga or novel. You know those guys who don't care about the repercussions, and just win with absolute power. But, in this world, nobody as cool as that exists.”

“.....”

“Your younger sister said it, right? We all have to move forward. No matter how lame you may look, that's the only way. Because nobody can be a cool hero.”

“...”

“That’s why! Don’t run away! Get up again! Staying down all your damn life is the same as being dead! If your legs don’t work, then crawl! Become even more desperate! No matter how long it takes, no matter how lame you may be! Don’t stop moving forward! Because... **that’s what it means to be alive, you moron!**”

“.....”

With these words, I finally understood why Schrö-senpai slapped me like she did. If anything, I feel like punching myself right now. What have I been doing this entire time? Everything I worried about, she broke it down just like that. Just as Schrö-senpai stated, I was simply running away. Getting pulled along the situation, and hesitating. I stopped walking myself. But...

“.....”

Slowly, strength returned to my legs, and I stood up again. I finally stood on solid ground again.

“...Onii-chan.” Schrö-senpai said, while letting go of my collar, and spoke with a gentle voice this time. “You okay now?”

“—Yes.” I declared.

I finally could answer that question. I’m fine now. I’m a helpless chicken bastard after all. Being unable to get up before was the best proof. I couldn’t be further from being a manga or novel hero. Just a weakling, nothing more. But...

“I’m going.” I calmly told Schrö-senpai.

That’s right, even a chicken bastard like me has to move forward. No matter how lame I may be, I have to get up and start walking. Right now, I’m far too pathetic. No matter what may have happened recently, that’s not an excuse to forget like this. The family motto that Mom told me, and that Kureha reminded me of, it’s similar to what Schrö-senpai just told me. No matter how much of a chicken I may be—No exactly because I’m a chicken, I have to live on, crawl along the ground, and keep on living, no matter how lame it may be,

so that I can take a step forward. This kind of reckless style—is my way of living.

“...Gotcha. Go get ‘em, tiger.” Schrö-senpai nodded.

She might have grasped where I was about to go.

“But, just wait a second, Onii-chan.”

“Eh?”

She stopped me at the weirdest timing possible. Is there something else she wants to tell me?

“...Phew.” Schrö-senpai let out a faint sigh. “Hit me.”

“...Excuse me?”

“I’m telling you to hit me. I just hit you before, and it came out of nowhere. That’s why...before you go, hit me first. So that we’re equal.”

“.....”

...Holy smokes. She’s amazing. How can you be so cool?

“...Come on, hurry up. I don’t like pain.” She sounded somewhat bashful.

...After a brief silence, I spoke up.

“...I understand.” I nodded. “Then, please close your eyes.”

“Huuuhu!? Why!? You had your eyes open when I hit you!”

“But, it was a surprise attack, so that much should be fine, right? Don’t worry, I won’t hit your face.”

“Urk...F-Fine then! Don’t look down on me, I’m not scared or anything!”

Or so she said, but her eyes were quivering with fear. Her face looked like a small child’s that just got scolded.

“.....”

So, while looking at the girl—I tightly embraced her. As closely and passionately as I could.

“Wha—”

For a moment, Schrö-senpai’s face turned beet red. She probably didn’t expect this kind of development.

“Y-Y-Y-You bastard! What are you doing!?”

“Eh? I mean, I said I wouldn’t hit you.”

“So why are you hugging me instead!?”

“Better than getting punched, right?”

“Y-You’re not wrong, but...”

“...Schrö-senpai.”

As she was left baffled, I calmly spoke up.

“—Thank you very much.”

I gave her my gratitude, directly and as straightforwardly as I could.

“~~~! Moron! Don’t thank me! Also, just go already! I’ll take care of Usamin and the others!” She screamed, trying to hide her embarrassment.

“Please do.” I briefly replied, and let go of her.

And then, I ran away from the shrine, sprinting along the asphalt to reach my goal—The flat where my best friend and her master lived.

Chapter 5: Sheep and Chicken

It was currently 7.59pm. As I was gasping for air, I finally reached the flat, with a single door in front of me. It was the apartment Konoe Subaru and Suzutsuki Kanade lived in. Right now, they should be inside.

“.....”

Quietly, I pressed the doorbell, to which the door opened.

“So you’ve come again, Odd Jobs-san.” A robotic voice greeted me.

Standing in the open door frame was Saotome Ichigo. It was a similar situation compared to when I last visited. As always, Suzutsuki’s personal maid gave me a cold and harsh glare. I however didn’t back down, and told her directly.

“Ichigo-san, let me meet Suzutsuki.”

“.....”

Silence. She merely looked at me.

“NO.”

With a single word, she openly expressed her disagreement to my request.

“Odd Jobs-san, as I told you before, the young lady is not feeling well. I can’t have you meet her—”

“Is she really sick?” I asked, and continued. “Isn’t it just that she doesn’t want to come to school?”

“.....” Ichigo-san stayed silent for another moment, and then opened her mouth. “No. I don’t think that she doesn’t want to go to school. She simply—Doesn’t want to see you.” She declared. “Odd Jobs-san, do you remember what I told you the first time you came to the

Suzutsuki Residence?”

“That’s...”

Back in September, Suzutsuki took me and Kureha in as servants. At that time, Ichigo-san forcefully tied me up, and told me—‘You changed Kanade-ojousama.’

“This is all your fault.” She spoke with a sharp tone, and continued. “Because of you, Kanade-ojousama has gone crazy. That’s why I can’t let you inside. I can’t have you meet the young lady. That is what she wishes for.” She showed no emotion in her voice.

Maybe she was given the order to chase me away in case I attempted to meet her again. However...

“—I won’t leave.” I declared, not losing against Ichigo-san’s stare.

On my cheek, I still felt the sensation of Schrö-senpai’s palm.

“Until you let me meet Suzutsuki, I won’t go home. Or rather, I can’t go home.”

“...Hmmm. But, no matter how long you may wait, I will not let you meet her.”

“Then I’ll just go there myself.”

“...You’re saying that you will forcefully enter her room?”

“Yes.”

Immediately after I uttered those words, a sharp sensation touched my neck—A knife. It was a short, but sharp knife. I don’t know from where, but Ichigo-san held it in her hand, pointing the tip at me.

“Let me warn you.”

Even though she was pointing what could be used as a weapon towards another person, she still spoke calmly and with no emotion in her voice.

“Unlike my chainsaw, this knife can actually cut.”

“.....” I audibly gulped.

The sharp, radiating tip of the blade was directly in front of me. Compared to the blunt chainsaw, this one was actually dangerous. She was warning me. This time, she wouldn't hold back.



It was such a simple message, showing that she was serious. If I set another foot ahead, she would do everything it takes to stop me. She probably won't kill me, but probably bring me to the point of passing out. She's looking at me like an enemy, aiming to harm her master. But...

“—”

I can't pull back here either. I realized my mistake, and I can't run away anymore. That's why I—

“.....!?”

Immediately, I heard Ichigo-san swallow her breath. I don't blame her, I grabbed the sharp knife with my bare hand after all.

“...Odd Jobs-san, you...”

Blood came gushing out of my hand, as Ichigo-san stared at me in disbelief. It hurts...a lot. Of course it would, I was holding the knife in my hand, as it cut into my palm. The blood continued to droop down on the floor. Even so—

“Ichigo-san, please step aside.” I asked her, knife in my hand.

I'm trying to show my determination. Even if she threatens me with a knife, I won't back down.

“...Are you sane? Doing something like this...”

She's saying that I've gone mad. Of course, this kind of method isn't cool at all. A protagonist from a manga or novel would be able to figure out a smarter method. At the very least, they wouldn't grasp the knife like I am doing right now. But, I'll make do with this. I don't care how lame I look, this is my method, the way of the chicken.

“.....”

A certain scenery popped up in the back of my head. It was back during April at the leisure land. I was wrapped up in Suzutsuki's plan—the aimed abduction. It was an attempt to resolve Koneo Subaru's

trauma with knives. In the end, she was forced to fight her old man, wearing a wolf's mask. In order to save me, she grabbed a knife the same way I'm doing right now. And, what about after that?

'I am—a butler.' She said, and stopped the knife with quivering fingers. 'That's why...I'm not scared at all...!'

In order to protect something important to her, she showed her determination. While watching her, I thought of her as a sheep. A small sheep, quivering in fear in the face of a large wolf, and even so, it tried its hardest to fight back. Normally, the sheep would get eaten and it's all over. The strong devour the weak. The weak are defeated by the strong. That is the rule of this world. But...A single sheep should be able to kill a wolf, right?

Overthrow the rules, fight against the strong, despair turns cowards courageous. Whatever term you want to use. There should be a sheep baring its fangs at a wolf, biting into its throat. There should be a sheep able to break a wolf's fangs.

“.....”

That's right. Remember the Konoe from back then. Sheep and chicken; we're both weak. I'm not as strong as Kureha. I can't get over my first love that easily, let alone get up from the fall—I'm far too weak. That's how much of a helpless weakling I am.

But, that's exactly why...Just like Kureha reminded me, just like Schrö-senpai told me, and just like Konoe desperately fought back then, you need to move forward no matter how lame you may look. And then, you have to get up again.

It took me a long time, but I finally remembered. All thanks to Kureha and Schrö-senpai, of course. I won't ever forget again. Being a chicken is my way of living. That's why...

“Let me say it again. Please let me through, Ichigo-san.”

“Urk...”

She still held onto the knife, but took a step backwards. Maybe she was intimidated by me and my actions. Of course, nobody would be

willing to hurt themselves like I am right now. If only she would give up now...

“NO!”

However, Ichigo-san still muttered these words despite all of that.

“I am the maid of the Suzutsuki Family, and I will protect the lady’s orders at all costs.” She said, and glared at me.

...I figured. She’s the club president of Rouran Academy’ handicraft club, and the lowest rank of that. At the same time, she’s Suzutuski’s maid, so she won’t let me pass that easily.

“.....”

Can’t help it then, I have to forcefully make my way past—

“Stop, Ichigo.”

Suddenly, an alto voice spoke up, coming from the hallway behind Ichigo-san. Standing there was—Konoe Subaru. She is Suzutsuki’s male crossdressing butler, now flashing a sharp gaze at the knife aimed at me.

“Subaru. What do you mean by that?” Ichigo-san kept her gaze at me, asking the person behind her back.

Konoe went silent for a moment, and then spoke up.

“...Exactly what I said. Don’t point that at Jirou.”

“NO. I can’t do that. He is trying to meet with Kanade-ojousama. I was ordered. ‘If Jirou-kun comes, send him away’, is what she told me. Isn’t that the same for you?”

“...Yes, that is what she said. But...”

“But?”

“ ... ”

Silence. Another long silence filled the hallway.

“I think the young lady should meet Jirou.” She declared.

“...Are you being serious?” Ichigo-san’s tone was far deeper than what I had known from her.

She turned around, facing Ichigo-san.

“You plan on disobeying Kanade-ojousama’s orders?”

“...Yeah, I do.”

“Why?”

“I’m sure that it’s for the lady’s sake. At the very least, that’s how I feel as her butler. She should meet Jirou...No, she has to meet him. That’s why I will go against her orders. This is my decision as her butler.” Konoe declared with no hesitation.

...Ahh, so she’s changed, just as I did. It must have been the date with Kureha, and the words she received. Just like Schrö-senpai changed me, Konoe must have gotten over her hesitation. Recently, she seemed uncertain of her actions and choices. However, none of that was shown in her expression right now. It’s like she reached some kind of decision, she emitted strong confidence.

“Not to mention, Ichigo, don’t you remember? Jirou is the lady’s friend. That’s why you’re not allowed to hurt him. She said that before, yeah?”

“.....”

Ichigo-san had no words to argue back, simply pouting.

“YES. Odd Jobs-san is Kanade-ojousama’s friend. That’s why I can’t hurt him. Because she would be sad.” She said, and threw away the knife.

It fell to the ground, stopping in front of Konoe’s feet.

“...Ichigo. Then...”

“Yeah. I really don’t like it, but I will give Odd Jobs-san permission to

see Kanade-ojousama.”

“...Thank you, Ichigo.” Konoe let out a relieved sigh.

And then...

“Odd Jobs-san, can I believe you?” She suddenly said. “It pains me to say it, but I can’t save Kanade-ojousama.”

“.....”

“However, if it’s you, who managed to change her, then it might be possible.”

“.....”

“That’s why, I need to ask. Can I put my faith in you?” Ichigo-san said, closely looking at me with her one eye.

...Ahh, I see. She simply cares for her master. That’s why she pointed a weapon at me.

“—Yes.” I nodded strongly. “For now, believe in me.”

“Really? If you don’t succeed, I might regret it for the rest of my life. I might vent my anger out on you.”

“I don’t mind. But, I will definitely save her. No matter how long it may take. After all—We’re friends.”

“.....” Ichigo-san stayed quiet for a moment, and then opened her mouth. “—YES.” She nodded, and showed a bow, like an actual maid.

“...Thank you very much, Ichigo-san.” I gave her my gratitude, and came inside.

This was the first time I actually stepped inside this apartment, but because it was still inside the same flat as Masamune’s, it didn’t feel all too new.

“Follow me, Jirou. I’ll guide you to the young lady’s room.”

“Got it.” I calmly answered, and followed after Konoe.

Two weeks ago, I destroyed the relationship we had—as best friends. But...

“...Konoe.” I spoke up to my former best friend. “Once I’m done talking with Suzutsuki, I need to tell you something as well.”

I need to bring an end to this. So that I finally stop running away.

“...Alright.” Konoe nodded. “That reminds me, you were watching my date with Kureha from afar, right?”

“...Sorry, we didn’t mean to deceive you, but...”

As I figured, Konoe caught on to us following them. Well, that makes sense, I was chasing after Kureha towards the end after all.

“No, it’s fine. You must have been worried about Kureha-chan, right? Not to mention, that’s not what I wanted to ask...”

“Yeah, don’t worry.”

I figured out what she was trying to say.

“Kureha is fine.”

“.....”

“She told you, right? No matter how long it may take, eventually we all have to get up again. At the very least, she’s aware of that.”

“.....” Konoe stayed silent for a moment. “...You’re right.” She said, looking directly at me. “Jirou, two weeks ago, you said that we should stop being best friends, right? Back then, I couldn’t do anything, and just kept crying.”

“.....”

“But, I’m different now. Hearing Kureha-chan’s words, I realized. I’m sure that I was just running away from reality. After all, whenever I was crying, you’d always come to my rescue, right?”

“.....” I had no words to respond with.

It's true that I always tried to help her when she was in pain. I simply wanted to protect her. I didn't want to see her cry...

"...Thank you. Being saved by you made me really happy, always. But, I only now realized. I was—always relying on you." She spoke like she was telling herself. "No, not just Jirou. Even my lady, you were both always kind to me, saving me when I was crying. And, I was being spoiled by that kindness without even knowing it."

"...Konoe."

"But, hearing Kureha-chan's words today, it all clicked. When I fell over, I always waited for someone to get me up. I was asking for help. I didn't even try to get up myself."

"....."

"Sorry, Jirou. It's pathetic how long it took me, but I finally realized. That's why—I **won't cry anymore.**" She continued. "When you said we should stop being best friends, all I could do was cry. I was waiting for help, but that never arrived. That was the last time."

"....."

"That wasn't the time to cry. I should have mustered up my courage, and told you about everything. Because you're my best friend...No, because I wanted to be with you."

"....."

"That's why...Jirou, I also have something to talk about with you. If you're okay with it—Would you hear me out?"

"....."

As I remained silent, Konoe kept looking up at me, her eyes dampened. Well yeah, I bet that asking for this must have cost a lot of courage. After all, we're not best friends anymore. Two weeks ago, on that Sunday, I rejected her, pushed her away. If it was the same Konoe, she most likely would have cried. However.

"....."

She didn't. I'm sure she must be scared, of course. Worried about being pushed away again. Thinking about the what if of being pushed away once more. However, she didn't cry. She desperately held back her tears. I bet that she must be trying her hardest to change right now. Trying to change her weak self, the self that only relied on me or Suzutsuki, the self that couldn't get up on her own, the self that always sought help.

—She's a sheep. That's what she is. She looked like a small lamb shaking in the face of a wolf's sharp fangs. But, it's actually different. After all, I knew. The scenery from the leisure land popped up in my head again. During the abduction incident, Konoe was scared, and still faced the threat. At the very least, she wasn't crying back then. She faced her trauma of sharp knives, and fought. She wasn't relying on anybody.

We're sheep and chicken. Both cowards, both weaklings deep down. With just a bit of trouble, we immediately get lost. However, we still have to get up, we have to keep walking. We weaklings have to fight like weaklings do. That's how we keep on living. That's why, what I have to say right now is...

“—Got it.” I calmly nodded. “I need to apologize myself. Just like you were relying on me, I simply kept running away. That's why I said what I said. I'm sorry, Konoe.”

“...Jirou. Then...”

“Yeah, let's talk it out. Talk about everything. If you were to forgive me, then I want us to get along. I want to be—with Konoe Subaru.”

“.....”

I confessed my feelings. Still holding back in the tears, Konoe gave me a faint ‘Thank you’. Alright, that's all the preparations complete. Konoe and I finally managed to face each other, and managed to be honest. With this, I can finally focus on the other reason I came here—Konoe Subaru's master. The girl who had kept herself hidden for the past two weeks—

Charara~ La~ La~ La~ La~~~

Suddenly, a cheerful melody, unbecfitting of the mood, started playing. My phone in my pocket was vibrating as well. This melody was the theme of the ‘The Godfather’ movie.

“.....”

Everybody went silent. Konoe and I simply listened to that melody, as I took out my smartphone, and accepted the call. And then, I slowly put my phone to my ear.

‘It’s been a while, Jirou-kun.’

I heard a familiar, dignified voice. Just as she said, it felt like I hadn’t heard that voice in a while—Suzutsuki Kanade. She’s the master of Konoe, and another friend of mine.

Chapter 6: Suzutsuki Kanade

Clack.

With a different hand from the one that had the handkerchief drenched in red wrapped around it, I twisted the doorknob. What appeared beyond the door was Suzutsuki's room. It wasn't as luxurious and bourgeois compared to her room in her own residence, as this was just a normal flat apartment, so it was fairly normal. A bookshelf, a bed, a TV, a closet...all living necessities were present similar to Masamune's room.

However, there was one difference—A giant mirror that stood out drastically. A full-length mirror, I think you call it. It stood in the corner of the room, having large cracks inside of it, like someone hit it with a blunt object. It looked like spider webs almost, not allowing you to confirm your own appearance inside of it.

“...So you've come, Jirou-kun.”

I heard a voice from a bit further away. Turning my gaze towards the source of said voice, I spotted Suzutsuki, simply standing there. However, she had her back turned towards me, not allowing me to see her expression.

“Did something ridiculous again? I heard the ruckus even from here.”

“...Don't worry, it's not that big of a deal.”

“You suck at lying as always, I see.” Suzutsuki said, not looking at me.

Quietly, I formed a fist with my injured hand. Konoe gave me first-aid treatment with this handkerchief, but the wound still hurt. Being cut by a knife like that would probably warrant a visit to the hospital, and the scar would probably stay there, but that doesn't matter at all. What mattered is that I needed to see Suzutsuki.

“I'm sorry. My maid must have caused you some trouble. But, don't

be angry at her, it's all because I ordered her."

"...Suzutsuki."

I wanted to tell her that I didn't mind. But, there was something more important to clarify.

"Suzutuski...why did you stop coming to school?" I asked Suzutsuki's back.

—Let's meet tomorrow. That's what she told me. And yet, she didn't come to school. She didn't come to meet me.

"...Fine, I'll tell you." She still kept her back towards me, and continued. "—I couldn't smile anymore." She said.

"...You couldn't smile anymore?"

I was confused, and the best I could do was return the question. Even so, Suzutsuki continued.

"Two weeks ago, after we went on a double date with Usami-san... When she told me that, I couldn't smile anymore. It's weird, right. Even though I was so good at it before..."

"....."

"I mean, that's how I've been living my high school life. You remember what Usami-san said, yes?"

"...Yeah."

Inability to put trust into others—Usami Masamune said that Suzutsuki Kanade had this problem. Masamune herself was similar before. That's why she said that she and Suzutsuki are the same. Suzutsuki is wearing the mask of an honor student, and it's because she can't put faith into others. In other words, she didn't have anybody she could be her true self around. That's why she was all alone...

"It's exactly as Usami-san said." She spoke, like she was confessing her sins. "I'm sure that I can't trust anybody at school. I somehow

managed to melt into the environment at school, but it was all because of my acting. That's all...nonsense. That's who I am."

"...Yeah, it's true that you were acting like an honor student at school, but..."

Why? Why was there any need to go that far?

"You seem curious about the reason why, Jirou-kun. It's quite simple." She said, and continued. "Because that's much easier, right?"

"...Easier?"

"Yes, that's right. I don't understand other people's feelings, and I can't put faith in them. I have no idea what people think about me. That's why, if I act like an honor student, I can perfectly fit in."

"....."

"That makes everything much easier. Nobody will deny me. Nobody will hurt me, and I can rest easy. That's why I put on the mask. I just kept lying to myself, and to everybody. But...Hearing what Usami-san said, it felt like I had gotten crazy." She continued. "Everything she said was true. I feel like my mask was pulled off me. She broke my mask, and revealed my true face. So far, that never happened, and yet she made it look so simple."

"But, that's because she..."

"I know, I know. She wanted to save me. But, Jirou-kun...I'm scared."

"...Scared?"

"...Yes. Over these two weeks, I tried going to school. But, I couldn't. I was scared of meeting everyone. I even tried to hide from Subaru or Ichigo. Do you understand why?"

"....." I stayed quiet, and looked around her room.

The clue I found awfully quickly—The mirror. Or rather, the broken mirror. The cracks on it made it virtually impossible to confirm one's

own appearance inside of it. And then, Suzutsuki's previous words.

—*I became unable to smile.*

“...I'm such a coward, I can't help but hate myself for it. Even as I prepare to head to school, someone inside of my heart tells me 'What if someone says the same as Usami-san?'. 'What if they saw right through your nonsense?', you know.”

“.....”

“Thinking about it that way, I got so scared...and practiced smiling in front of the mirror as much as I could, but...it was all for nothing. No matter how much I smile, it's all fake. If I don't do better than before, people will see through it again...”

“.....”

I see, that's why she didn't come to school. Normally, she's a perfect and unparalleled honor student, and everybody admires her, but...In fact, she's just a weak, fragile girl, who can't put faith into other people. She tried her hardest to hide these weak parts about her, kept up her act no matter how far she had to go, she kept up her mask, and relied on making up lies...

“...It's impossible. The moment I think about the possibility of people seeing through me, I can't put any faith in them. In you, Subaru, Ichigo, Kureha-chan, Usami-san, and even my other servants. Even my family...”

“.....”

“When I think that I can't put faith into anybody...I don't know what to do...and I can't tell anybody about my honest feelings...because I'm too scared...”

“.....”

“That's why...I...I...”

All of a sudden, Suzutsuki's voice sounded weak. She might just be crying right now. However, I couldn't see that, as she still hadn't

turned around towards me. She probably was scared to see my expression. Not knowing what she should do.

“.....”

...Ahh, she's probably exhausted. Ever since we got into the second term, she's been acting off. She suddenly turned into Yamitsuki-san, trying to make me hate her, used me and Kureha as servants, and then became Derechuki-san. She probably was having a lot of trouble behind the scenes as well.

It's been around three months since the new term started. That entire time, she was worrying, suffering, being exhausted, and pushed to the ground. And then, the finishing touch was Masamune's statement two weeks ago. For Suzutsuki, it was the final straw that broke the person that she was.

Look at the mirror. She tried smiling again and again, but to no avail. She can't even put faith in her own lies. She vented her anger out on the mirror...which only exhausted her even more. Yet, I—

“.....”

Stop. I can always curse my own inability later. What's important is what I do from here on out. Because...

“Listen, Suzutsuki.”

While she kept her back turned towards me, I just told her what I wanted to.

“I...confessed to Konoe.”

“—Eh?”

For a second, Suzutsuki sounded like she didn't know what to say. That's right, the reason Suzutsuki felt so pressured is because of me. We were supposed to be friends, and yet I hid my confession from her. I didn't want to tell someone else, and kept it hidden. So, I don't know why, but Konoe did the same, and kept her own distance from Suzutsuki. If I had to guess, that must have been even more tough for her, as she can't put faith in other people. After all, we were

supposed to be her closest friends.

“T-That’s a lie! That can’t be true!”

However, Suzutsuki denied my words immediately.

“Why? Why are you lying about that? If you confessed to Subaru, then you two should be dating by now, right?”

“...No, we aren’t. She rejected me.”

“...!?”

It seemed unbelievable to her. But even so, I continued.

“Sorry. I’ve been keeping quiet this entire time. It was just hard to say...”

“.....”

“I’ll apologize. I’m sorry. I want to make up with you. So, could you maybe listen to my request?”

“...Request?” Suzutsuki, still not turning around, returned the question.

“Could we become friends again?”

“.....” She swallowed her breath.

“There might be times where I have to keep secrets from you again. Everybody has secrets, but even so...Won’t you put faith in me? I’ll trust you as well, okay?”

“.....”

“I don’t think that human relationships can ever be perfect. People hide things, people fight, but even so...I want to forgive all of that, and get along with you.”

“.....”

“That’s why, please...If you’re fine with me, could we become friends

again?”

“.....”

A long silence filled the room. And then—

“...Why?” She asked with a quivering voice. “Why are you being that nice to me? What you’re saying is right. Human relationships can never be perfect. That’s why friends have to make up for it. But...why would you want to be friends with me?”

“Why...isn’t that obvious?” I answered with no hesitation.

I want to be friends with Suzutsuki.

“You looked like you were having fun.”

“Eh...?”

“It’s simple. When you’re with me or Konoe, you always look like you’re enjoying yourself. Or, was that all just acting?”

“N-No...! I...”

“You had fun, right? You were laughing for real, and told us your honest feelings. I hate to admit it, but your smile was really cute.”

...That’s right. Lack of faith in people or not, she looked like she was having fun when she was with Konoe and me. If so, then isn’t it fine? I don’t care if she puts up a mask at school. As long as she can call us her friends, nothing else matters. And, if she wishes for it, then we can try and find more people she can call friends. We’ll surely be able to help—That’s right. We can make Suzutsuki smile. As long as it makes her happy.

“Not to mention, you think of your servants as your family, right?”

“...But, I...there were times when I couldn’t properly put trust in them, and couldn’t tell them my honest feelings...”

“Don’t be so down about that. Nobody is pressuring you that much. You want them to be your family, right? What’s the big problem,

then? Surely, Ichigo-san will be glad.”

She most likely already feels that way. No problem at all, really. Just look at Konoe and Ichigo-san. Just like Suzutsuki likes them, they surely feel the same way.

“But...but...” Her voice sounded teary.

It sounded like she was desperately trying to deny my words. And then, another silence happened, filling the air. I don’t know how long it lasted. Only then, she seemingly made up her mind.

“...Are you fine with me?” She spoke, anxiously.

Her attitude was different from her usual perfect self. I’m sure that this must be an important first step for her. She faintly opened up her heart. That’s why I have to answer her feelings. Straightforward, and directly.

“—Yeah. I want to be your friend. That’s why, even if it’s just a bit, please have some faith in me, and I’ll do the same.”

“—” I heard the sound of Suzutsuki swallowing her breath.

I think that she was crying right now. I don’t know if my words reached her, but...if this managed to close the distance between us...

“.....Hey, Jirou-kun.” She still sounded worried, but still continued with all her might. “You said that you’d be my friend, right? If so... would you mind listening to my honest feelings?”

“.....”

Honest feelings...She wanted friends she can be honest with. Someone she can tell the truth to. So if she wished for that...

“Yeah, if you’re okay with me.” I answered.

I probably was too desperate to save Suzutsuki, desperate to grant her any wish—

“—I like you.”

However, I would have never imagined what happened after that. In an instant, she turned around, revealing the tears running down her eyes. They were large grains of tears. And yet, she looked directly at me, and tried her hardest to convey her feelings.

“—I love you!”



Chapter 7: Winter, and...

December 5th, it was still fall season—or so I wished, but the seasons tend to go by all too quickly. Even though we had a clear fall sky during the day, the nights were awfully cold, suddenly covering the night—Indeed, the season called winter was quickly approaching us. Or rather, it was probably chasing after us, which gave my skin the chills.

And today, the 5th of December, is a very important day to me, Suzutsuki Kanade. Today, I confessed to Jirou-kun. Or rather, I went and did. I decided to hold back on that, decided to not rely on him anymore, and decided to keep those feelings to myself—but in the end, I couldn't hold myself back.

—*Farewell, Jirou-kun.*

Last October, at the amusement park, I decided on that. It should have been the ending of everything. After all, I got to spend an enjoyable time thanks to Jirou-kun becoming my servant, although my young self caused a lot of trouble. With that, I should have been happy and satisfied. That's why I said goodbye to him.

On the final day of summer break, August 31st, I decided on this. Konoe Subaru, my butler and best friend, the person most precious to me, was the reason I decided to seal away my own feelings. That's why I kept myself at bay through the entire September, deciding to help her. I would come up with ways that allowed Subaru to get closer to Jirou-kun, made him my servant after his house burned down to close the distance between the two, and moved next to him to ensure that he wouldn't get stolen by Usami-san...it might sound weird coming from me, but I believe I did a lot.

The finishing move was the Suzutsuki Revolution. Or, that's what everybody at school calls it. Since Usami-san said that she and Jirou-kun started dating, I declared that Subaru and I were in that relationship ourselves. It was all to pull Jirou-kun's attention to Subaru. I figured that he might show some kind of action.

Thinking about it, I probably was panicking quite a bit, suddenly declaring my relationship with Subaru to be that. I most likely felt pressured to the point I had to choose that. However, it was all for nothing. It was a miscalculation on my end. To think that Subaru would reject Jirou-kun at the amusement park. Maybe it all ended there. I want it all to be over.

“...”

Yeah, we should just end it. Alright everyone, thank you very much for reading this far. This is the ending of our story. It's a bit sad that we have to bid farewell now, but it's fine. We will continue to live on inside your hearts, so don't forget about us. Then, until we meet again—Farewell.

“...Just kidding.”

Sadly, things won't be that convenient. Our story still continues. It has to, as we still have more to tell.

“...Excuse me, my lady.”

The door to my room opened, and my butler walked inside. She, Konoe Subaru, possessed glossy hair, clear and translucent eyes, a slender physique, and beautiful facial features like a handcrafted doll. She gave me a somewhat worried gaze, as she looked at me.

“Subaru, what about Jirou-kun?”

“As you ordered, I had him go to the hospital. However, were you really sure about that?”

“Oh, about having Ichigo go with him? Well, it should be fine. Having someone tag along would be best, and this might be a good chance for them to get along more.”

After my confession, I forced Jirou-kun to see a doctor at the hospital. In fact, the injury on his hand seemed to be pretty deep, so he would probably need immediate treatment. That's why I ordered Ichigo to forcefully take him there. Naturally, that means I haven't heard the response to my confession.

“.....”

No, rather than not having heard it—

“...Kana-chan.” An alto voice rang out, desperately trying not to shake.

That surprised me. Even though I didn’t give her any order, she called me Kana-chan.

“Kana-chan, I need to apologize to you.”

“.....”

“After all, Kana-chan...you...You like Jirou, right?”

Her voice sounded close to breaking apart. However, she didn’t cry. She tried her hardest to keep the tears back, as she continued.

“I’m sorry...if only I had realized earlier...If I hadn’t relied on you on the final day of summer break...!”

“.....”

“It must have been hard for you, right? Even though you have feelings for Jirou-kun, you always helped me...I just relied on you without knowing...Even though you were suffering, I just...I just...!”

“...Subaru. It’s enough.” I said, and embraced her.

Gently, but still strongly.

“...S-Stop that, Kana-chan. I don’t have any right to do this...I only relied on you...”

“Don’t worry. I want to hug you, so that’s why I’m doing this. More importantly, Subaru, when did you catch on to my true feelings? What was the trigger?”

“It’s because of what Kureha-chan said.”

“Kureha-chan?”

“...Yeah. When you collapsed, she told all of us. ‘Doesn’t Onee-sama like Nii-san?’, you know.”

“.....”

I see, that makes a lot of sense. I always thought it was weird. How did Subaru catch on to my feelings? It’s because of what Kureha-chan said before. If she hadn’t said that, Subaru would not have been this torn, and Usami-san most likely wouldn’t have attempted to pull me and Subaru away from Jirou-kun. Everything went crazy because of those words.

However, I can’t blame Kureha-chan either. She didn’t have any bad intentions with that. Rather, I’m to blame for being unable to fully read her moves. Not to mention...

“.....”

I should be thanking her. After all, if not for what she said, I might have had to swallow these feelings of mine until all eternity.

“...Subaru.” I said, still embracing my butler. “It must have been hard for you, right?”

“...N-No, not compared to you, Kana-chan.”

“...That’s not true. You rejected Jirou-kun’s confession after all.”

Subaru had it rough herself. Since she knew about my feelings, she must have gone through hell. After all, she likes me. As a butler, as a friend, she can be very clingy. So imagine it. Your master, your friend, likes the same person as you do. On top of that, that very friend was trying to hold back on her own feelings in order to support her. Knowing about all of that, it made sense that she would be conflicted. That’s why she most likely rejected Jirou-kun’s confession back at the amusement park.

“.....”

However, things weren’t resolved back then. If anything, they only spiralled out of control. That being said, this happens to everyone. Something you do out of goodwill backfires, resulting in a worst-case

scenario. Nobody knows when it happens, but it's unavoidable. Thinking about it, ever since we went to the amusement park, Subaru and Jirou-kun were much more distanced from each other, and my relationship with Subaru also became awkward. While the situation grew worse, her moves were limited. That's why there is no doubt in my mind that she must have suffered. She's not the one to blame.

As much as I struggled, so did she. That's why she wanted to rely on someone. But now, she came to meet me face-to-face, and stopped doing so. She held back her tears, facing me. If this was the old Subaru, it would not have been possible. By just relying on us, she would not have been able to take a step forward. I don't know for what reason, but she changed. That's why she mustered up the courage to reveal everything to me. Just because of that, I—

“...Kana-chan?” Subaru looked at me.

A warm sensation ran down my cheeks—Tears. I was crying.

“...Sorry, Subaru.” I apologized with a teary voice.

I had to apologize. After all, at the end of last summer, I promised. I said I would support her...and yet I ended up cornering her like this. Even though she's my butler, my friend, she knew of my feelings and suffered this entire time¹.

“...No, I should apologize. After all, I made you suffer. I just relied on your kindness. Sorry, Kana-chan.” Subaru said, and tightly embraced me.

It feels warm. Her warm sensation was conveyed on my skin, and her heartbeat was practically audible to me.

“.....”

Ahh, I'm so glad. A lot happened, but I think we're finally back to normal. Master and butler—Suzutsuki Kanade and Konoe Subaru—This is what I wanted. We've made it back to being friends, a relationship where we can be honest with each other. That's why I'm fine now. Just like Usami-san said, I am unable to trust others. I am bad at putting my faith into others. I didn't tell Jirou-kun about it,

but the reason for that...happened right after I enrolled.

At school, I was special. I was the only daughter of the board chairman, and the daughter of the Suzutsuki Family. I'm a rich, noble lady. I was wearing a special uniform from everyone, having Subaru with me, another girl treated in a different way. Before I even realized, I felt the pressure. Or rather, it was pushed onto me. Random strangers forced me to become Suzutsuki Kanade, wanting whatever it was from me. That's why I didn't put any faith in others, as that would be an easier way of living. Wearing the mask of an honor student, I simply acted like the perfect rich lady to satisfy everyone. And then, eventually—

I became scared of showing my true self to others. Even though it was different at first, I became terrified of taking the mask off. I became unable to trust others. And, at the same time, I bet I simply wanted to show my true face to others. Inside the fake daily life at school, I wished for people to listen to my honest feelings. Like I was hoping for an oasis in the middle of the desert. That's why I became friends with Jirou-kun. I wanted a friend who I could be honest with at school.

Luckily, he seemed to have fun being with me. I didn't just want a friend in order to show my true feelings. I wanted to get rid of my boredom. My biggest enemy is being bored. And, he managed to remove all of this boredom. Every trouble that occurred with him involved was fun. And, from time to time, he would show me his cool side. That's right, I really like him.

“.....”

So, I need to bring an end to this.

“Subaru.” I asked, moving away from the girl. “You like Jirou-kun as a girl, right?”

“.....”

Silence followed. Subaru must have been bewildered at this straightforward question. But, normally I wouldn't even have to ask that. It's an obvious answer. I know that she likes Jirou-kun. And, the

current Subaru should be able to declare that. She gave up on relying on me, and properly faced me. That's why—

“I like Jirou-kun.” I declared.

We need to bring an end to this. When it comes to romcom novels or dating sims, there might be a happy harem end for everyone, but we don't have such a peaceful option available. Could there be an ending where we all get to be happy? If only we could do that. This is like a stage play with several Cinderella actresses. Like you're crossing the race at the sports festival together hand in hand. With no winner, there's no loser. Sweet, and sweeter than sweets.

However, there's no guarantee that this will happen. This isn't a game, it's reality. Someone here might not be able to become happy. However, we still need to reach a conclusion together. Konoe Subaru, Suzutsuki Kanade, and also—

“So, what do you think about all of this, Usami-san?”

As I asked this question, Subaru let out a baffled ‘Eh?’, and turned towards the door. And then, it slowly opened, revealing a somewhat sharp girl with twin tails—Usami Masamune. She seemed nervous, as she looked at me and Subaru.

“Wha...Why is Usami here?” Subaru was baffled.

However, I wasn't. After all, I called her here. I kept it a secret from Subaru, but while sending Jirou-kun off to the hospital, I wrote Usami-san an email, saying that I kept the front door open, so she should come to my room. This was the first time she came here, of course. She probably relied on the sound of our voices to come here. Naturally, that meant she heard our conversation.

“Tell me, Usami-san.” I asked her.

After a brief silence...

“I'm—the same.” She declared. “I also...like the stupid chicken.”

“I see...Thank you for being honest, Usami-san. By the way, have you already realized?”

“...What exactly?”

“That Subaru is a girl, of course.”

“...!? M-My lady!?” Subaru screamed.

I don't blame her. It's basically a question of life or death if Subaru managed to keep the fact of her being a girl hidden. If somebody were to find out, she would have to quit as my butler. However, things should be fine.

“—I knew it.” Usami-san muttered, like she had solved the mystery. “I had a feeling that things were like that.”

“Wha...” Subaru was bewildered.

I however expected this, and asked instead of my butler.

“Since when?”

“When the stupid chicken and I started living together. The way he acted towards Subaru-sama...it felt like he was interacting with a girl. And, the way you made it sound just now, it all made sense.”

‘You like Jirou-kun as a girl, right?’

That's the question I asked Subaru a moment ago. And, Usami-san must have heard that, as she stood beyond the door.

“I won't ask why Subaru-sama was acting as a boy at school. It must be some super complicated reason, right? I can tell by looking at Subaru-sama's expression.”

“You're right. It's related to Subaru crossdressing. We've been keeping that a secret. That's why, do you mind keeping this a secret from everyone?”

“...Fine. Right now, I can keep my secrets even more than before.”

“That reminds me, you liked Subaru as a boy before, right?”

“...That's long gone. Right now—I like the stupid chicken.” She

declared, like she wanted us to know. “Not to mention, I don’t want things to end in such a lousy way. I want to properly bring my feelings to a conclusion.” She grasped the hem of her skirt, but tried her hardest to sound confident.

That’s very much like Usami-san. Normally, she always looked so twisted, but in fact, she’s an honest and clumsy girl. If not, then she wouldn’t be able to say this.

“I understand. Then, Subaru, let me ask you one more time. How do you feel?”

It was a cruel question. Thinking about our current relationship, it was a harsh thing to ask. I knew that while asking. I know that she likes Jirou-kun. But...

“...I—”

I’m sure that her putting it into words was equally important.

“I like Jirou.” She said, showing no hesitation.

She declared this while looking at her master’s eyes. It was something the previous Subaru would not have been able to do.

“.....”

With this, the stage has been prepared. Winter has arrived, fall has left, and our story is changing like the seasons. We have to bring it to a conclusion. Endlessly dancing atop the stage isn’t fun to watch. I’ll say it again, there might be a possibility that some of us won’t become happy. Even so, we have to bring this love to an end one way or another, just as we come clean with our own feelings, so that we can move forward.

I don’t know what kind of ending is waiting ahead of us. After all, this isn’t a game, but reality. Maybe a dream-like ending is waiting for us, or maybe it could be a hellish outcome. Either way, it’s our reality.

“.....”

Despite that, we won't stop moving forward. We confessed our feelings here, we made up our minds. Just as Usami-san said, we're not going to have things end vaguely. After all, we won't hesitate anymore.



[1](#) I guess the idea of “Talking” doesn’t exist in this universe. Lord help me

Afterword

It's been a while! [Mayo Chiki!] has finally reached its tenth volume! I'm the author Asano Hajime. And like this, I've entered my third year as an author. Thinking about it, a lot has happened since my debut. The time when I thought of the plot of a new novel now feels nostalgic. A powerful heroine, resolving various problems at school with her handicrafts club she established, a noisy but enjoyable romcom...The title was 'Assassin Schrödinger-san'

...Yes, well, I don't feel much nostalgia but more terror than anything, really. If anything, the plot of this I came up two years ago now is probably off gathering dust somewhere on a hard drive. Maybe I was just a bit tired two years ago? As you may have guessed, that idea was quickly thrown out of the window, but the character of 'Schrödinger' stuck with me, which brought life to Narumi Schrödinger, or Schrö-senpai for short. She gained quite the amount of popularity, which makes me dream of a revival of 'Assassin Schrödinger-san'! No, I doubt it is quite impossible.

With these things going on in the background, [Mayo Chiki!] has reached its 10th volume. We've now made it to the first chapter of the climax. As it would be a spoiler, I can't go into details here, but with one of the heroines having made up her mind about her feelings, we set foot onto the finale, or so I'd like to believe. If you're still uncertain about picking it up, then please keep that in mind, and slam it down on the cash register with a choke slam!

Now then, let me give my thanks. First up is my editor Shouji-sama. I've really been in your care over the past two years. On top of [Mayo Chiki!], they are also my editor for [Recommended Girlfriend for the First Time]. I have nothing but gratitude, really. Please continue to take care of me.

Next up is Kikuchi Seiji-sama, who has provided me with wonderful illustrations as always. The moment I get to see the illustrations, I feel so joyful. I'm so thankful that you can make time for me in your busy schedule.

Continued, the editor-in-chief Misaka-sama, everyone from the editorial department, the proofreader, designer, everyone involved with the publishing and distribution, even the various light novel authors helping me, drinking sake with me, NEET-sensei who is responsible for the comicalization, Eichi Yuu-sensei who is responsible for the spin-off [MayoMayo!], everybody involved with the anime, and of course my readers, thank you very much.

I do think that [Mayo Chiki!] is brought into existence through a team effort. Because of many people helping me, [Mayo Chiki!] has grown this much. With the story rushing to its climax, I would be happy if you stayed with the series a bit longer.

Now then, let's move on to the announcement corner. The next volume will be the winter break arc. The relationships of our characters have started to change. We have Christmas, New Year's, and the entrance ceremony. Many more events are coming, and the story will accelerate.

On top of that, the spin-off [MayoMayo!]'s third volume was released on the same day as this 10th volume! Also, the second volume will be the final one. Eichi-sensei, thank you very much, good work all-around. Even Ichigo-san and Kosame are part of the anime, so I highly recommend you check it out!

At the same time, the second drama CD of [D-Frag!], releasing in the [Monthly Comic Alive] magazine, which I have provided the scenario for, is also on sale right now! Please check it out if you're interested!

Finally, a bit of a personal advertisement, but the new series I am writing, called [Recommended Girlfriend For The First Time] is also on sale under the MF Bunko J imprint. The third volume will be released soon, and the story has picked up speed as well, so I hope you check it out!

Now then, while hoping that we will see each other again, I will step on the gas until my fuel runs out, so please continue to support me from here on out as well.

Asano Hajime

Credits

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